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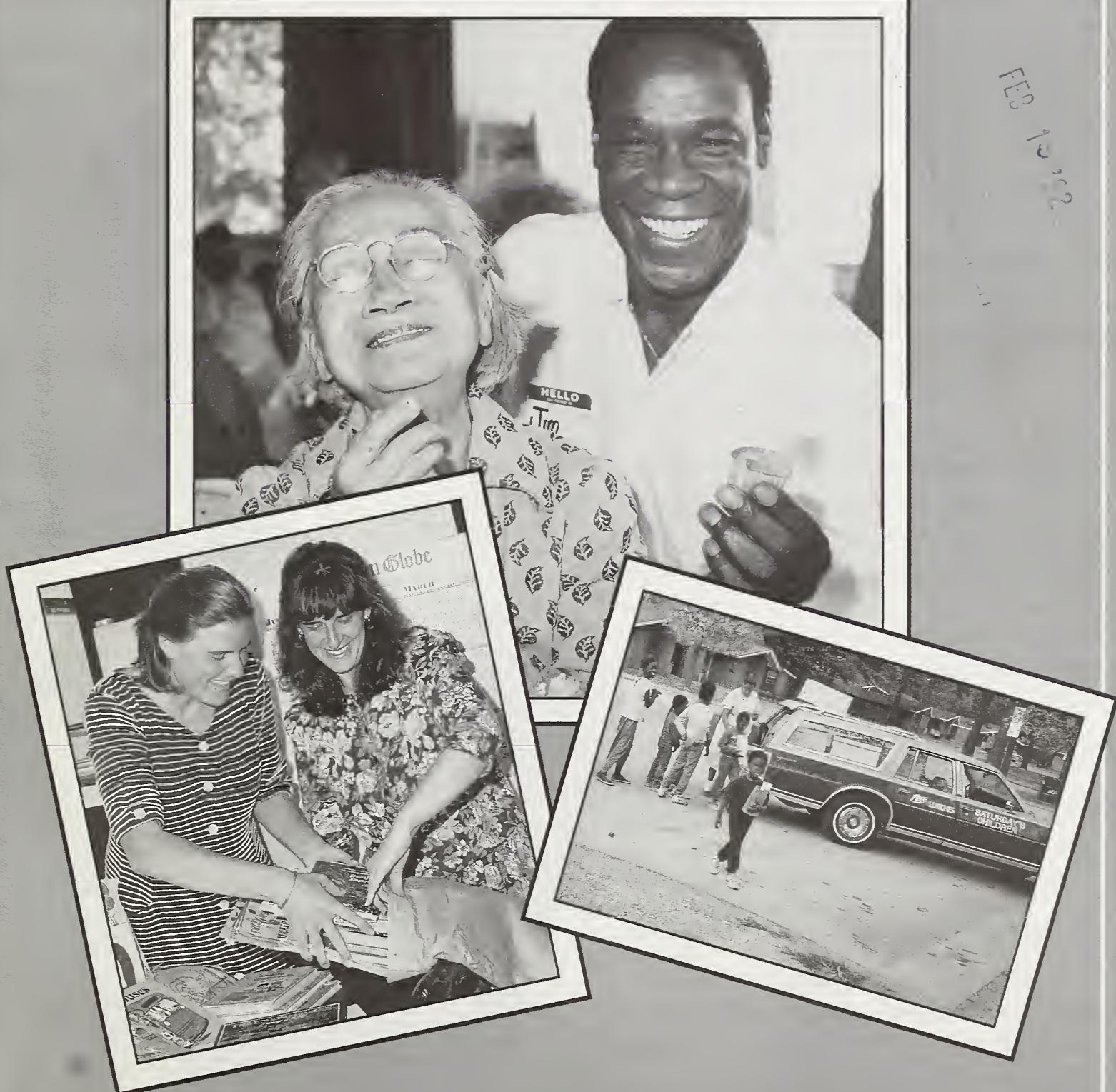
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Food & Nutrition

SEPTEMBER 1991

VOLUME 21

NUMBERS 1-2



GOING THE EXTRA MILE

"We all have something to give..."

On a cold night in January when thoughts were turned to the men and women serving in the Middle East, President Bush urged the American people in his State of the Union address to remember that there are many ways they can serve their country at home.

"America has always led by example," he said. "So who among us will set this example? Which of our citizens will lead us in this next American century?"

He answered: "Everyone who steps forward today—to get one addict off drugs, to convince one troubled teenager not to give up on life, to comfort one AIDS patient, to help one hungry child....

"The problems before us may be different," he added a few moments later in his speech, "but the key to solving them remains the same. It is the individual—the individual who steps forward. And the state of our Union is the union of each of us, one to the other—the sum of our friendships, marriages, families, and communities...."

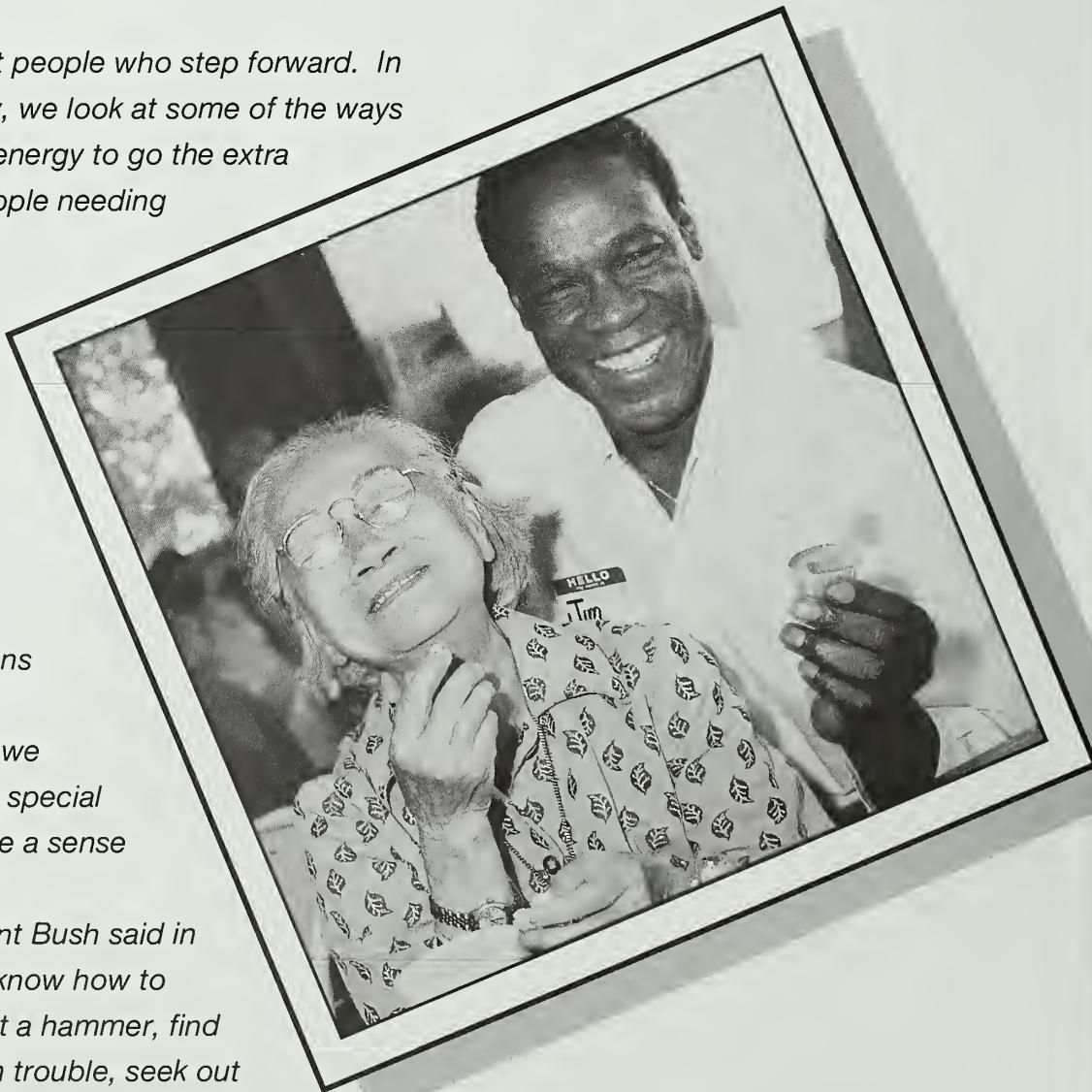
This issue of **Food and Nutrition** is about people who step forward. In a variety of articles from around the country, we look at some of the ways Americans are using their time, talent, and energy to go the extra mile in service to others—particularly to people needing food assistance.

Some of our features are about volunteers, working in unusual as well as traditional ways. Others are about people who through extra on-the-job efforts are making a difference in the quality of service their agencies provide. Still others are about business and community leaders who have gone out of their way to explore some long-term solutions to problems facing families in crisis.

All of these people—and the many more we learned about but couldn't feature—bring a special enthusiasm to what they do. They also share a sense that individuals can make a difference.

"We all have something to give," President Bush said in his State of the Union message. "So if you know how to read, find someone who can't. If you've got a hammer, find a nail. If you're not hungry, not lonely, not in trouble, seek out someone who is...."

"...So if you know how to read, find someone who can't. If you've got a hammer, find a nail. If you're not hungry, not lonely, not in trouble, seek out someone who is..."



Making life better for others...

Volunteers Step Forward...And Make A Difference



More and more Americans are volunteering their time to help their neighbors. According to a recent Independent Sector/Gallup survey, in 1989 more than 98 million Americans—up 23 percent from 1987—volunteered their services to charitable endeavors. Together they contributed more than 20 billion hours of time valued at \$170 billion!

Betty Jo Nelsen, administrator of the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), the USDA agency with responsibility for the federal food assistance programs, sees volunteering as part of the very fabric of American life.

"Volunteerism is a unique characteristic of our society," she says. "No other country offers service to others the way we do. It's part of our heritage, part of our culture."

French statesman and political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville was struck by the generosity of American people more than 150 years ago.

After visiting America in 1831, he wrote "Democracy in America," a comprehensive, classic treatise on the functioning of democracy. In it he says, "I have often seen Americans make really great sacrifices for the common good, and I have no-

Many FNS employees volunteer. Pictured here, from the Northeast region, are: James Burton, at a party for the elderly at Boston's Eva White Residence; Susan Wadden and Pamela Farwell, packing toys for children; and Marguerita Cora, serving Thanksgiving dinner to the homeless.

ticed a hundred cases in which, when help was needed, they hardly ever failed to give each other trusty support."

Nelsen observes, "As new immigrants come to this country, they adopt this part of the culture that is truly American in nature. And it's critical—the country couldn't make it without people helping people."

"Volunteers humanize problem solving..."

Like President Bush, Nelsen believes that government programs alone—no matter how effective—cannot address all the problems people face. Churches, organizations, advocacy groups, and individuals at the local level must play a vital role. "And," she says, "volunteers *humanize problem solving*."

While volunteer service clearly has a profound effect on others, she adds, it also has an impact on the volunteer. "In fact," says Nelsen, "volunteers gain as much as—and sometimes more than—the people they're helping."

Along with the satisfaction of helping another person and the recognition a volunteer may get for providing that help, volunteering can also offer opportunities for personal growth.

Many activities allow volunteers to display or develop leadership and organizational skills or to utilize artistic and athletic abilities. In addition, Nelsen points out that volunteer work can be an excellent way to offset an



Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administrator Betty Jo Nelsen is pictured here during a visit to a Minneapolis WIC clinic. Nelsen, who has a background in nutrition and served as a Wisconsin state legislator from 1979 to 1989, says her volunteer experience helped prepare her to manage FNS.

unsatisfying job or even launch a new career.

"If you're in a job that doesn't interest you," she suggests, "look for a volunteer job that does. You may gain the experience you need to apply for a more exciting position."

Nelsen, who has a background in nutrition and served as a Wisconsin state legislator from 1979 to 1989, credits her own volunteer experience with preparing her to manage the Food and Nutrition Service. As a volunteer for the Milwaukee Department of Public Welfare 23 years ago, she worked with both that agency's employees and clients.

She helped welfare clients fix up their homes and counseled them on budgeting resources. She set up a child care center, staffed by volunteers, for clients to use while they

applied for benefits. She also taught juveniles in the correction system about nutrition.

Through these volunteer experiences, Nelsen learned about the people on welfare, as well as the services the government provides, and how clients can make the most of them.

She says, "I wouldn't have this job today if I hadn't been a volunteer. I got to know the welfare system through my volunteer work."

Later, Nelsen worked as coordinator of corporate volunteers. Her job was to convince corporate managers to create volunteering teams—like they do bowling teams. Companies began by setting up steering committees, which Nelsen worked with to recruit volunteers, choose projects, and plan recognition events.

"Volunteerism is a unique characteristic of our society. No other country offers service to others the way we do. It's part of our heritage, part of our culture."

One of many ways to get involved

While many people continue to get involved in volunteer service through the traditional avenues of churches and synagogues, volunteer action agencies like the Red Cross, and their children's activities, more and more are getting involved through the workplace. People who work with Betty Jo Nelsen at FNS and in other USDA agencies are no exception.

Each year, USDA employees contribute generously to fundraising drives like the Combined Federal Campaign and United Way. They also participate regularly in Red Cross blood donor programs; organize and contribute to charitable efforts providing food, clothes, and toys to needy families; and help with a variety of community-based activities sponsored by USDA.

One favorite community project is helping Washington-area children at Van Ness Elementary School, which USDA "adopted" almost 8 years ago under the "Partnership in Education" program.

Through the program, individual employees volunteer their services to support and enhance many areas of school life. Volunteer activities—including everything from tutoring

students to organizing field trips and raising money to send kids to summer camp—are aimed at helping prepare these children for the future.

Tom O'Connell, a food program specialist with the Food Stamp Program, is an enthusiastic rookie volunteer at Van Ness. "I think the kids are better off simply because someone is spending time with them one-on-one," he says. "The teacher is glad I come, and the kids are glad to see me. I look forward to Tuesday mornings at Van Ness."

Each week O'Connell drives from his office in Alexandria, Virginia, to the school, located on a major Washington, D.C. thoroughfare in a low-income area. The inner-city school is surrounded by a paved parking lot and playground; military installations; and a diverse assortment of apartment buildings, town houses, and public housing units both occupied and under renovation. The U.S. Capitol is its backdrop.

"When I arrive, the neighborhood is quiet and peaceful," O'Connell says. "It reflects the quiet halls and well-disciplined environment inside the school."

Reinforcing what kids are learning

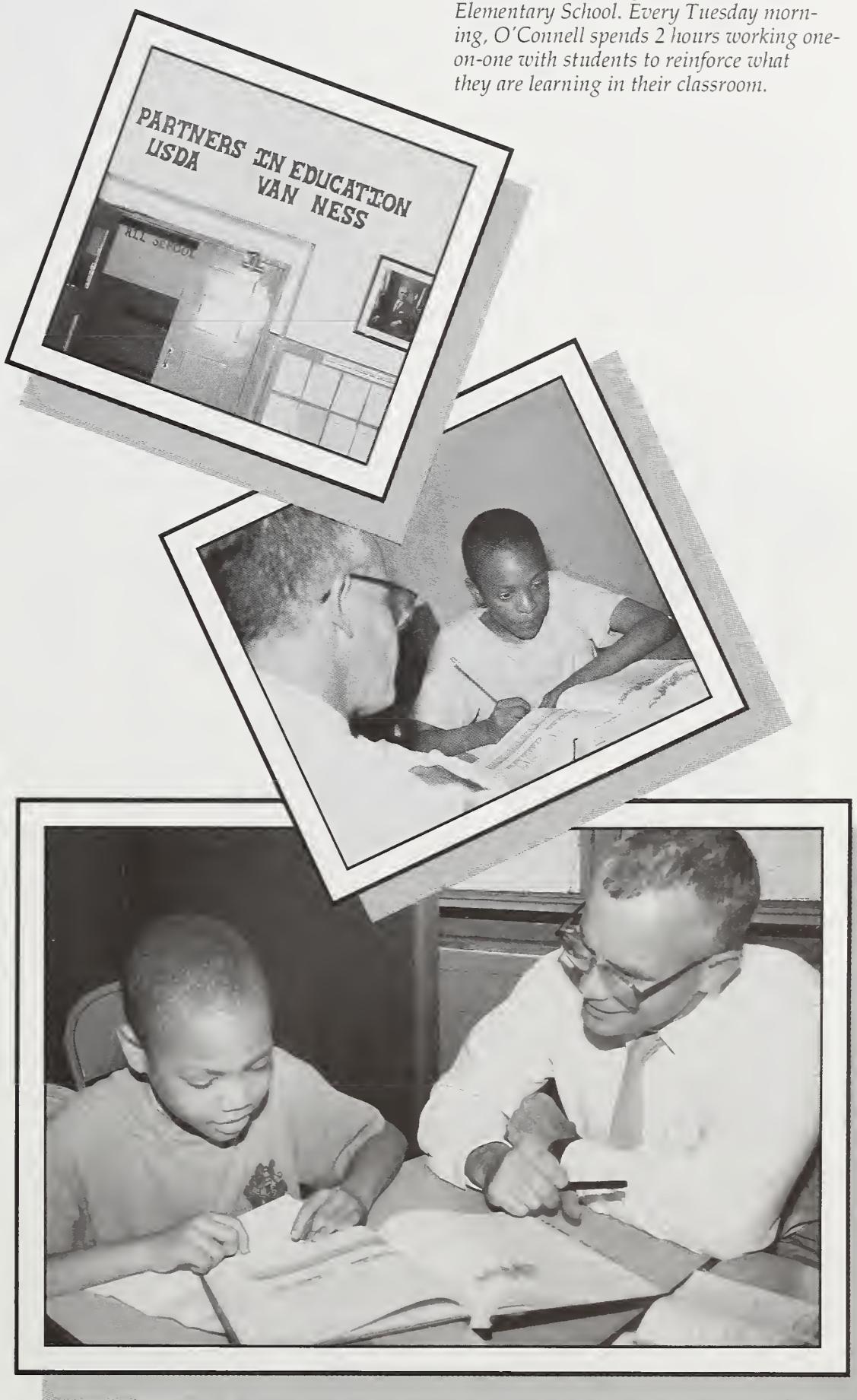
O'Connell is assigned to one classroom and does whatever the teacher requests during his 2-hour stay. He has been working with the same two bright, energetic third-grade boys all year, usually reinforcing arithmetic and reading lessons.

"I recommend tutoring at Van Ness for people who like to be around kids and whose supervisors will give them full support," he says. "For me, this experience enhances my FNS career. I get to step into a different world and see different interactions."

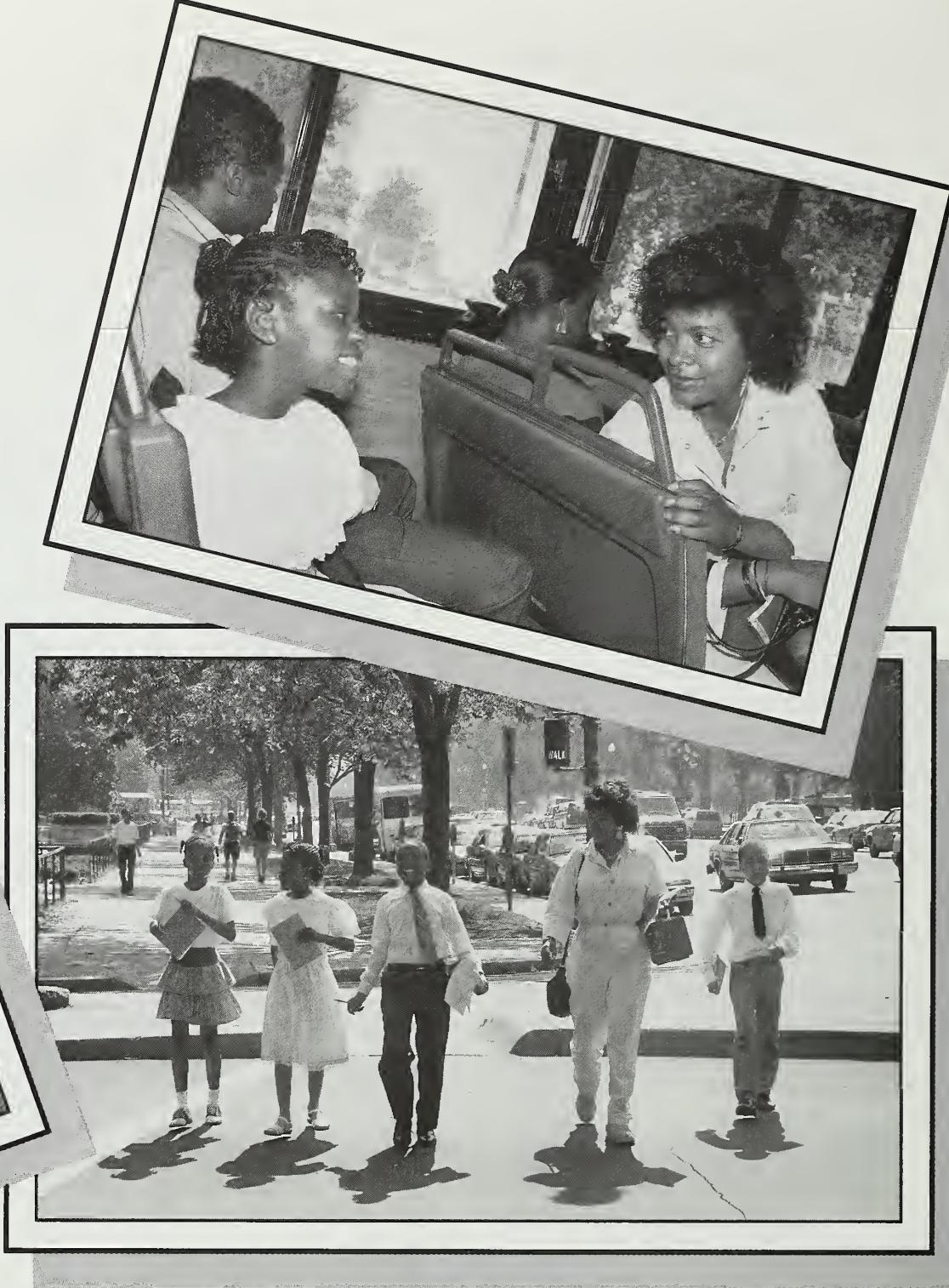
Emma Ward, also a food program specialist in the Food Stamp Program, is a 6-year veteran tutor at Van Ness. She places a great value on education because, she says, "if you have an education, you have choices in life."

In tutoring math and reading, Ward has found the children eager to ab-

Tom O'Connell, a food program specialist with the Food Stamp Program, is a volunteer tutor at Washington, D.C.'s Van Ness Elementary School. Every Tuesday morning, O'Connell spends 2 hours working one-on-one with students to reinforce what they are learning in their classroom.



Organizing and leading field trips is another way USDA volunteers contribute to school life at Van Ness. Here Emma Ward, a 6-year veteran tutor, takes a group of enthusiastic youngsters to the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History, a few blocks west of the U.S. Capitol.



sorb what she teaches them. "In some instances, all the children need is a little individual attention to provide some links in the learning chain they may have missed along the way."

Ward reinforces their learning through praise and positive statements. One of her favorite children's stories is "The Little Engine That Could." The engine keeps telling itself "I think I can, I think I can" until it finally says "I know I can." "That's what I want the children to realize," Ward says.

Van Ness' principal, Cassandra Butler, greatly appreciates the assistance of the volunteers. Her em-

phatic one-word description says it all: "Invaluable!"

U.S. troops also say thanks...

In another volunteer project, Mary Morris, lead secretary of FNS' public information staff, spearheaded an ambitious effort to support military men and women serving in Operation Desert Shield in the Persian Gulf.

"We started out last September suggesting that employees write letters to U.S. service men and women in Saudi Arabia," she explains. Then she learned from relatives of service people that the troops were starving for mail and reading materials.

That was all the motivation Morris needed to launch an all-out campaign. She organized a lunchtime letter writing session at headquarters. She and fellow employees donated paper, envelopes, humorous stickers, and stamps. Morris also supplied addresses for "Any Service Member" in each of the military branches along with addresses of relatives and friends of FNS employees stationed in Saudi Arabia.

Almost immediately, people began receiving appreciative responses from new pen pals.

(continued on page 8)

An Anniversary Celebration In The Northeast Becomes A Helping Tradition

Inspired by President Bush's call to volunteerism, employees of the Food and Nutrition Service's Northeast Regional Office (NERO) decided to celebrate FNS' 20th Anniversary in 1989 by going out into the community and helping. Two years later, they're still celebrating!

NERO staff came up with the idea of having their own "1,000 Points of Light" volunteer initiative in May 1989. They began by contacting local community groups and institutions needing volunteers, then organized teams of regional office volunteers and began scheduling activities.

One of their first activities was serving dinner at Boston's Pine Street Inn, the largest homeless shelter in New England. They also spent an evening at the Boston Food Bank, sorting through packages of donated foods, salvaging more than 11,000 pounds of food worth approximately

\$8,100 for distribution to the needy.

Trying their hand at catering, they prepared and served a spaghetti dinner to elderly residents of the Boston Housing Authority's Eva White Residence. And for children, they helped organize and run Massachusetts' Special Olympics.

Enthusiastic volunteers recruited co-workers

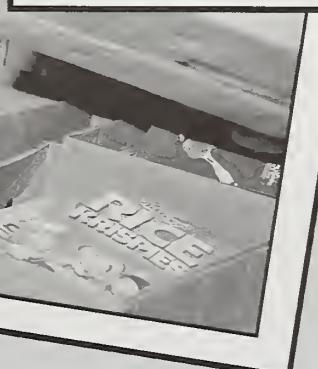
After each activity, NERO volunteers returned to the office beaming, telling stories about their work and what a good time they'd had, and recruiting their co-workers.

"More and more people were volunteering for each subsequent activity," says Brooksie Spears, a regional office employee active in the volun-

teer effort. "Everybody came away feeling good about themselves because they had volunteered, and good about the experience because it was fun."

The volunteer efforts organized as part of the 20th Anniversary celebration were so successful that the regional office established a standing "1,000 Points of Light Committee." The committee seeks out and organizes volunteer opportunities and rallies employees to participate. Its goal is to get employees out, in force, to work in the community.

These activities have included planting seedlings at an inner-city park; hosting a "nutritious and delicious" party for the elderly, using FNS nutrition expertise in preparing



FNS regional and field office staff in the Northeast have organized and taken part in a variety of volunteer activities, including sorting food at the Boston Food Bank (left) and serving Thanksgiving dinner to homeless people (right) at the New York City field office.

and sharing recipes for healthful desserts; participating in the Boston Walk for Hunger; and many others.

"There is a great team spirit..."

Besides providing a service to the community, the group activities have other benefits as well, according to regional administrator Harry McLean.

"Directors, supervisors, technicians, and secretaries go out as a team and work together at the same level," he says. "I think more than a few people are surprised to have their boss working side by side with them, say, for example, sorting cans at the food bank.

"Working closely together on something so worthwhile forges a certain bond or understanding between people. You gain a new respect and appreciation for one another."

The volunteer activities have had a noticeable effect on morale in the office, McLean says. "Everyone works as a group and shares as a group the special feeling that comes from doing something good. There is a great team spirit that comes from volunteering together, and this definitely carries over into the office."

Spears, who co-chairs the "1,000 Points of Light" committee, believes the benefits of

team volunteer activities are immeasurable. "In volunteering, employees are accomplishing a number of things," she says, "not the least of which is helping their neighbors. But their work also reflects well on themselves, FNS, and the government in general. It certainly counters the image of uncaring and impersonal bureaucrats.

"And," she adds, "one of the best things is that since most of the volunteer work is with poor people, it personalizes what we are doing in our jobs—it puts it on a more human level. When you have an experience like that, you become more sensitive to the importance of your work and are more motivated in it."

For more information, contact: Brookside Spears, Co-chair NERO Points of Light Committee Food and Nutrition Service, USDA 10 Causeway Street Boston, Massachusetts 02222-1068 Telephone: (617) 565-6490

*NERO article by Marty Boner
photos by NERO staff*

Brookside Spears, co-chair of the Northeast region's Points of Light Committee (front row, far right), and other volunteers gather in front of Pine Street Inn after serving dinner to homeless people living there.



An extra push for the holidays

Morris and other FNS employees then wondered how they could make the December holidays more enjoyable for the troops. "Of course, we thought of food," she remembers, "especially after asking the opinion of an official from the USO."

They renamed the project "Operation Des(s)ert Shield," and solicited volunteers to bake cookies and contribute recipes for others to use. Then members of the "cookie committee" scheduled three sessions for volunteers to package the cookies for overseas mailing.

"The response was really impressive," Morris says. "More than 50 employees came in during lunch and wrapped up all the baked goodies. We baked and mailed more than 240 pounds of cookies—22 boxes worth!"

Again, letters of appreciation came quickly. The troops loved the cookies and were clearly touched by the caring and effort of supportive strangers.

Morris' commitment did not end there. She maintained a bulletin board so that all FNS employees could share the thanks and news from our service men and women. She assembled a "Des(s)ert Shield Cook(ie) Book" and distributed it to interested FNS employees.

She also stayed in close touch with FNS employees who had family members and friends stationed in the Gulf, offering steady interest and support.

Special initiative honors volunteers

Betty Jo Nelsen enthusiastically supports volunteer activities at FNS. The agency's field and regional staff, like their colleagues in the national office, have put together and taken part in many interesting activities.

"I'm impressed by the many extra responsibilities employees have assumed and by the projects they have generated," she says. "I've seen great leadership from the employees who organized these efforts and great responsiveness and caring from the many others who contributed."

Recognizing responsive and caring acts of volunteers is one of the goals of President Bush's ongoing "Points of Light" initiative.

The initiative, which the President announced early in his administration, is designed to help the American people become more aware of simple, appealing volunteer opportunities and to encourage them to serve others with whatever means and skills they have available.

Every day, except for Sundays and holidays, the White House announces the name of an individual or group who has been chosen as a new "Point of Light." By the end of this summer, more than 500 "Points of Light" had been named throughout the country.

Another part of the initiative involves encouraging cabinet departments and agencies to become model community service institutions—with projects like the partnership with Van Ness—and to recognize federal employees who make volunteering part of their lives.

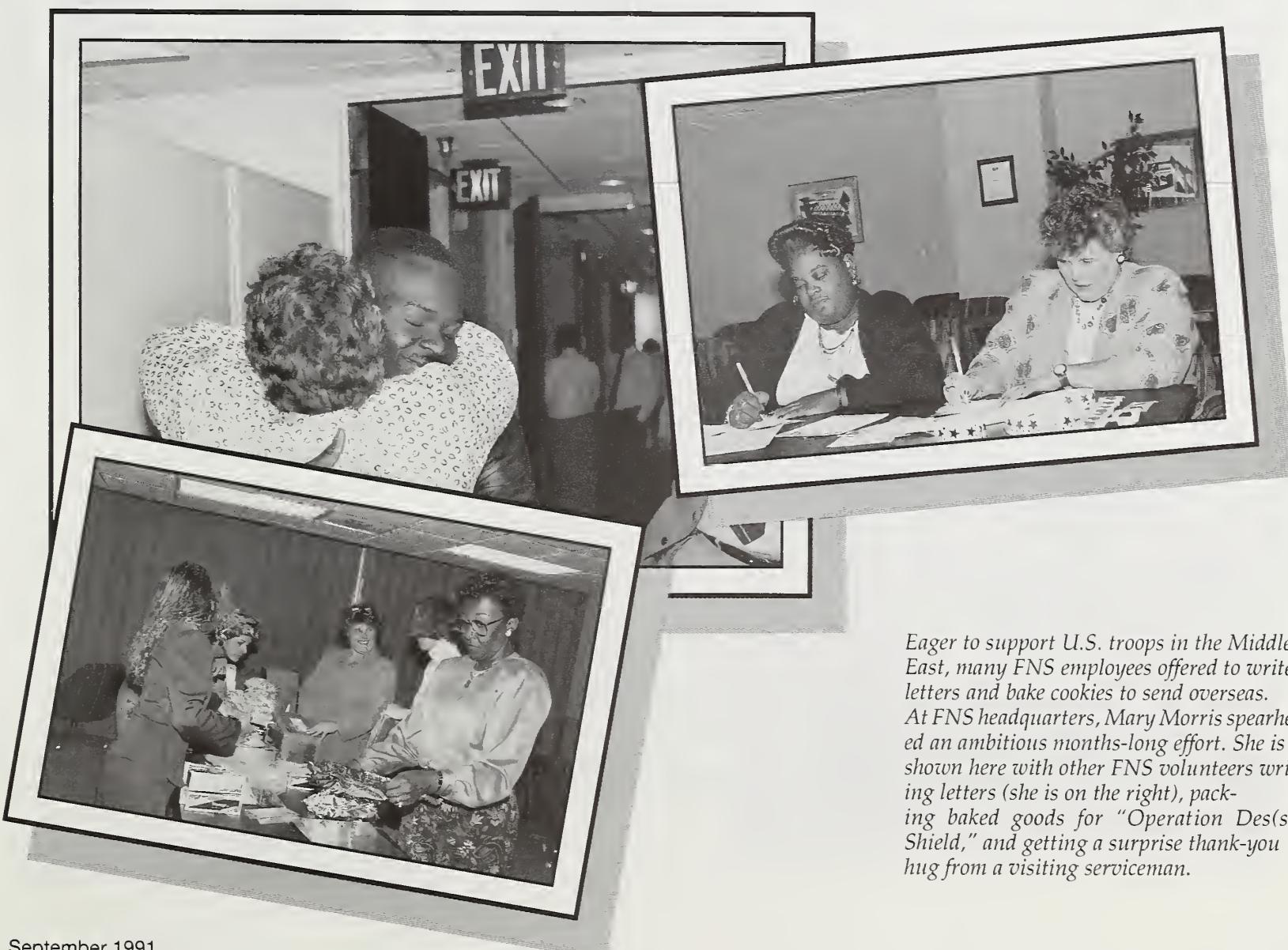
Responding to the President's lead, USDA developed its own Points of Light initiative in March 1990.

Like the national initiative, the Department's effort is designed to encourage voluntary service, help identify opportunities to serve, and honor employees for their individual contributions.

By March 1 this year, nearly 350 USDA employees had received personal letters from the Secretary of Agriculture. "I am proud of the exceptional individuals who are part of our community at the Department of Agriculture," former Secretary of Agriculture Clayton Yeutter said in a letter to Emma Ward in August 1990, thanking her for her volunteer work at Van Ness. "Through your efforts," he added, "life for many has been made better."

Other Food and Nutrition Service employees have been cited for services that include, among other things, providing emergency food help to families; helping with hospice care for terminally ill patients; work-

"I'm impressed by the many extra responsibilities employees have assumed and by the projects they have generated. I've seen great leadership from the employees who organized these efforts and great responsiveness and caring from the many others who contributed."



Eager to support U.S. troops in the Middle East, many FNS employees offered to write letters and bake cookies to send overseas. At FNS headquarters, Mary Morris spearheaded an ambitious months-long effort. She is shown here with other FNS volunteers writing letters (she is on the right), packing baked goods for "Operation Des(s)ert Shield," and getting a surprise thank-you hug from a visiting serviceman.

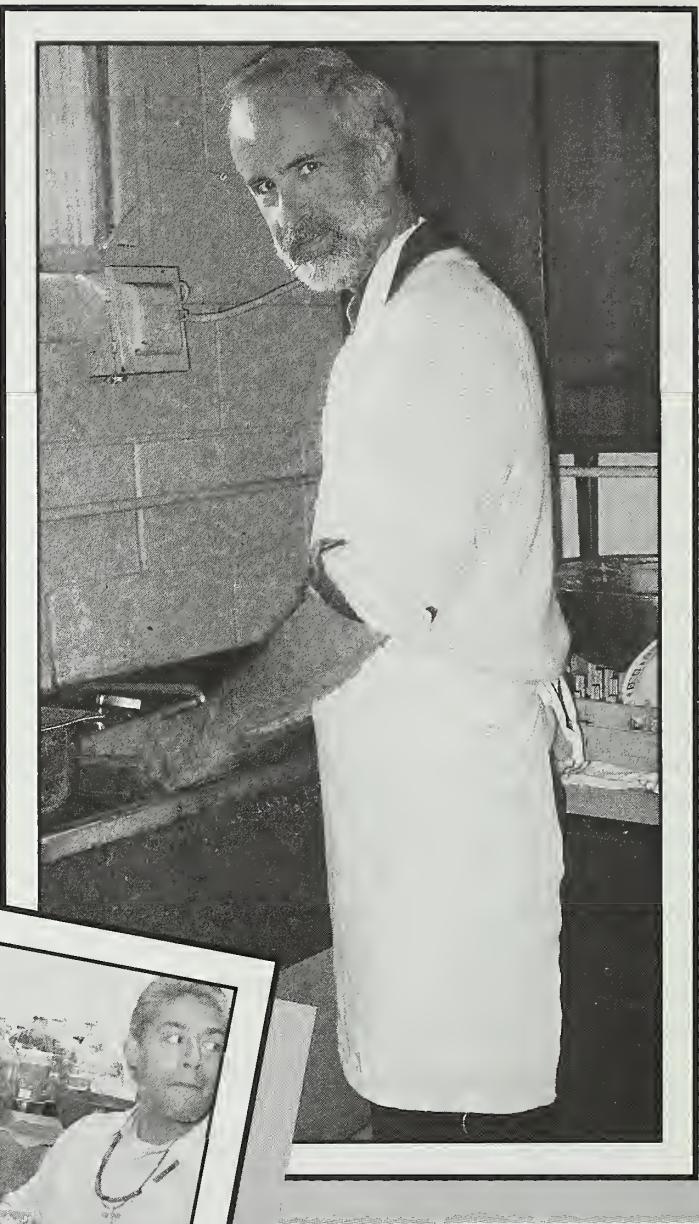
ing on wildlife conservation and preservation projects; and providing financial counseling to families through a state Extension office.

Serving at work and at home

Betty Jo Nelsen applauds all the FNS volunteers. "I'm very proud of FNS employees and their partners in state and local agencies," she says. "These folks are not only devoting their careers to helping people through the food programs but are also continuing to serve their communities on their own time."

Nelsen encourages more employees to join their colleagues in becoming part of the solution to problems they see around them. She quotes a line from President Bush's State of the Union message: "What government can do alone is limited, but the potential of the American people knows no limits."

*article by Debbie Massey
photos by Pam Faith and
other FNS staff*



Left: In the Midwest, a committee of volunteers put together six care packages to send to friends and relatives of FNS staff serving in the Gulf. Lisa Bauer (foreground) and Trish Solls headed the committee. Center: These two women were two of the 11 homeless guests who enjoyed the Thanksgiving meal prepared and served by FNS' New York City field office staff. Above: Mike McIlwain, from FNS' Southwest regional office, was also busy preparing Thanksgiving dinner for a crowd. He helped cook and serve 1,100 holiday meals to needy people in Marion, Indiana.

Offering homeless people "a hand up"...

Days Inns Reaches Out With A Chance To Start Over

In a large room dotted with computer terminals, agents are busy booking reservations. An observer would never know that some of the workers in this hub of activity are making the long struggle back from homelessness.

The place is Days Inns corporate headquarters in Atlanta, where company executives have spearheaded a recruitment program to hire homeless adults who are capable of working. The effort—sparked by one franchise owner's volunteer work at a shelter for the homeless in his community—has made Days Inns a leader in offering long-term solutions to people needing to rebuild their lives.

Around the country, people working with private social service agencies and public assistance programs—like food stamps and AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children)—are looking for ways to increase training and employment opportunities for their clients.

What Days Inns is doing to recruit, train, and, in some instances, offer housing to the homeless may be a source of inspiration and ideas for individuals, organizations, and businesses interested in helping in similar ways.

Visit to shelter sparked idea

The program got its start in early 1988 when Days Inns franchise owner Bill Hodges invited the then-president of Days Inns, Mike Levin, to a job fair at the shelter where Hodges was a volunteer. According

to Shira Miller, Days Inns community relations coordinator, the visit was an eye-opener for Levin and the other Days Inns representatives who accompanied him. What they expected and what they saw were very different things.

"When our staff went to the shel-

ter," she explains, "they had preconceived notions about the homeless as people who wanted to be that way. They found that most of the people were there due to unfortunate circumstances—either they were sick, or they'd lost their jobs, or they couldn't pay the rent for some other reason like that."

The experience prompted Levin, Hodges, and Vice President of Human Resources Richard Smith to do more than offer a handout. They wanted to give these people a hand up. Since little had been done in the area of hiring the homeless, the trio set out on uncharted waters. The course they set was not without

Days Inns president John Snodgrass stops by to say hello to Carol Thompson, a once homeless woman who joined the company 2 years ago as a general reservation agent.



"This is the way the private sector can really make a difference... by giving jobs to these people so they can rebuild their lives."

stormy weather. Of the first three employees hired under the pilot program, one left, two were fired. "We learned along the way," Smith says.

One group that was especially helpful was staff at the Achor Center, a shelter and job training facility that provides a variety of rehabilitative services to homeless women and children. In addition to referring potential employees from the women they serve at Achor, they also taught Days Inns recruiters techniques for screening possible hires.

"They taught us what to look for," says Miller. "Even though some people desire to work, they aren't capable of handling the job. Most of our employees are reservations sales agents. They are taking calls, so they have to be able to communicate."

"These are very good employees"

While the Achor Center strongly supported Days Inns' efforts, the program was not without its share of nay sayers. "We heard things like 'It will never work' and 'You need to do a lot of research before you make a commitment,'" says Richard Smith. "People told us it wouldn't be worth our time and trouble and that the homeless would be undesirable employees.

"It does take a little more work and a little more commitment on the part of the employer," he adds, "and more management until the person is comfortable. Then he or she is just like any other employee. So it is worth the time and trouble."



Although Days Inns executives are proud to be helping people in need, Smith is quick to point out that Days Inns also benefits from the recruitment effort. "This is a business," he says. "The overwhelming majority of people think we're doing something very charitable, but there's nothing charitable about it. These are very good employees."

Most of the homeless people Days Inns has hired have been referred by staff at the shelters in which they are living. But Days Inns has also hired some people who had nowhere to live. In these cases, the hotelier provides units through cooperating franchise owners.

Days Inns' special recruitment program is offered through the Atlanta corporate office (above) and the reservation center in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Each employee pays a modest sum for lodging through payroll deduction and signs a room covenant that outlines his or her responsibilities as a tenant. One of the many provisions under this agreement is that no child under the age of 17 may be left unattended in the room for any length of time.

While everyone hired through the program is encouraged to save and become independent, there is no

limit on how long employees can live at Days Inns facilities. "Circumstances are different in each case," Smith says. "We cannot dictate to these people."

Offering a chance to start over

Sensitivity, compassion, and respect characterize the way Days Inns executives approach their special recruits. They see their role as giving these people a chance to break through some of the barriers that homeless men and women can face when they are trying to start over.

"No matter how educated or intelligent you are," says Miller, "if you're talking to an employer and you can't give an address, you lose so much credibility. Maybe you have only one outfit to wear. This program overcomes problems like these."

In addition to offering training to help their new hires obtain the skills they will need to be successful on the job, Days Inns also makes special efforts to help them in other ways.

"We meet with these employees individually on a quarterly basis to find out what's going on in their lives and to monitor their progress here," Miller explains. "Our goal is to help them become self-sufficient."

There is plenty of proof that Days Inns is accomplishing that mission. Back in the room filled with reservationists, a smartly dressed, articulate woman finishes business at her computer terminal. She is Carol Thompson, a once homeless woman who seized the opportunity for a second chance and has become a true Days Inns success story.

Few understand the Days Inns philosophy better than Thompson. All employees hired under this program are guaranteed anonymity, but a few have chosen to come forward. Thompson is one of those.

"I was working when I got sick and lost my job," Thompson says. "That was before the doctor even knew what was wrong with me. I lost my apartment and ended up staying with

friends until I got to the Achor Center. They referred me to Days Inns. Four of us—all women—came together. After the interview, I got hired. I believe we all did."

Days Inns offers much more than just a first step—the company provides training and advancement opportunities. Thompson has been privy to both. "It's all there," she says. "You just have to work for it."

Her hard work has paid off

Hard work during her 2-year employment has paid off, literally. Thompson, who started as a general reservation agent, has been promoted to a more intensive area of reservations. "Now I work with computers," she says. "I never did that before."

Thompson has advice for those who are still homeless and even those who are not. "It can happen to anyone," she says. "But never, never, never quit." Thompson shares her story with a quiet reserve and pride punctuated with smiles. She vows she will continue to tell it "as long as it keeps helping others."

Currently, Days Inns has 18 active employees enrolled under this program. Most have begun to pull their lives back together. Thompson, for example, is out of the Achor Center and living in an apartment with her teenage son.

"This is the way the private sector can really make a difference," says Shira Miller, "...by giving jobs to these people so they can rebuild their lives."

Days Inns' recruitment program is offered through the Atlanta corporate office and the reservation center in Knoxville, Tennessee, and is currently limited to those two areas. For more information, contact:

Shira Miller
Days Inns of America
2751 Buford Highway N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30324

*article by Cathleen Jensen
photos compliments of Days Inns*



"...people think we're doing something very charitable, but there's nothing charitable about it. These are very good employees."

There's a special place on Bayard Street...

Police Officers Cook, Care, Listen, And Teach...

If you ask the youngsters who hang out at the recreation center on Baltimore's Bayard Street why it's such a popular place, they'll tell you the arcade games and sports are fun and the food is good. You'll also quickly learn it's because the facility is run by some people who really care about these 8- to 17-year olds.

The recreation center is actually a police youth club operated year-round by four officers of the Baltimore Police Department. All four volunteered for the assignment.

"These officers weren't randomly selected and slapped into an assignment to do this job," says Lieutenant Mike Hilliard, who oversees the operation. "They were assigned here because they wanted to be here."

One requisite of the job is an avid interest in working with low-income kids. Another is an eagerness to provide a wholesome and positive atmosphere in which these children can develop.

"Here we try to teach kids..."

In addition to organizing activities, refereeing games, and cooking, the officers help the children learn respect, social skills, and discipline. And the officers' interest in looking after the well-being of the kids doesn't end at 10 p.m. when the doors close.

"Generally at a rec center the children play games and then they go home. Here we try to teach kids in everything we do," says Sergeant Pete Legambi.

For example, he explains, while they don't have a structured drug

abuse or crime prevention program at the club, the officers reinforce positive values on a personal basis as they spend time with the children.

"We attempt to make these children model members of the community," says Legambi, "more so than they would have been had they never been in touch with the police youth club."

Throughout its 40-year history, the center has helped shape some of the city's finest.

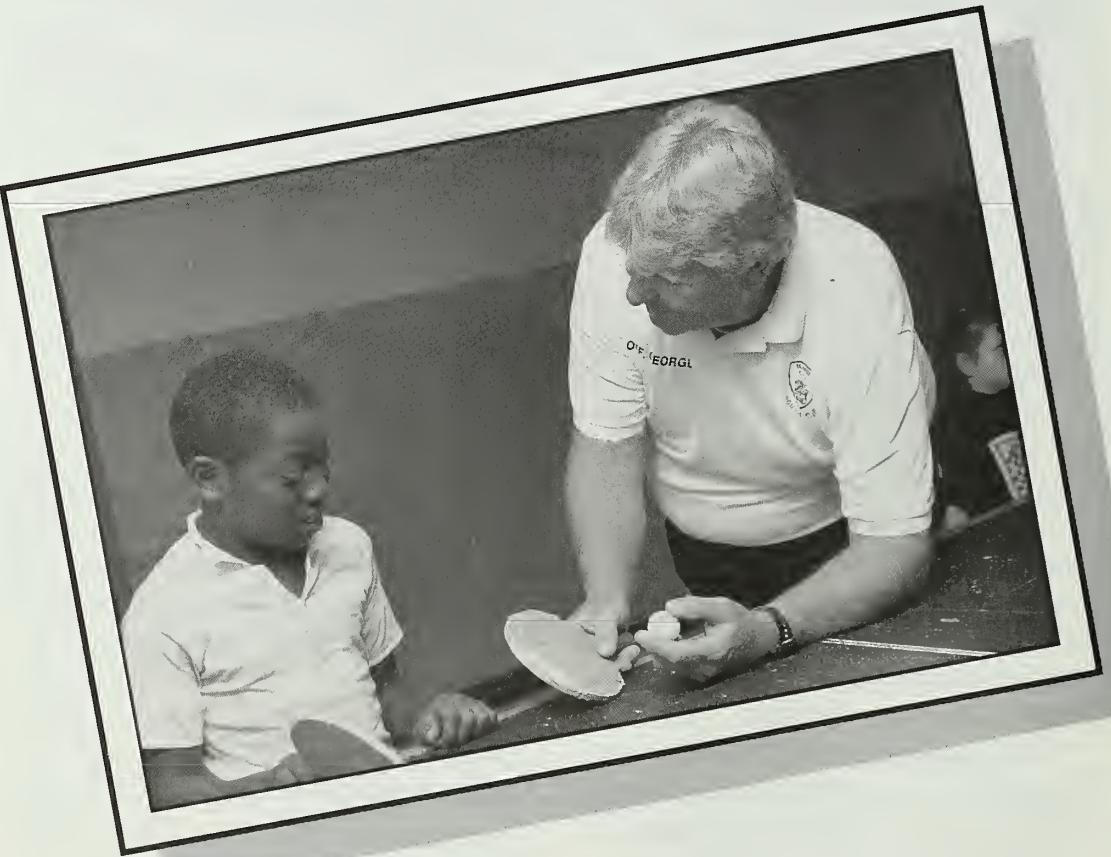
"Our former police commissioner and one of our councilmen came through this club," Legambi says

proudly. "Officer George Seltzer, who organizes the athletic activities here, also came through the club. He was going to be a professional baseball player for the Atlanta Braves, but he got injured. He thought so much of the club that he joined the police department and worked until he made his way back into the youth club."

Summer food program helps with meals

During the summer months, when the kids don't have access to school food service programs, the club serves breakfast and lunch. Officer Charles Benjamin wears the chef's hat. He has been cooking and keeping the kitchen immaculately clean for about 10 years. Whether he's flipping pancakes or baking crispy chicken for 30 or 100 children, nutrition and palatability are his main priorities.

The meals are funded by USDA's Summer Food Service Program and often include government-donated commodities. The varied menu comes from Benjamin's success in getting kids to try something new.



Police officer George Seltzer knows how much the club means to the kids—as a boy he'd been a member himself. Now, he organizes the club's athletic activities.



"Generally at a rec' center the children play games and then they go home. Here we try to teach kids in everything we do."

"My intention is to see that they get a nutritious meal and also that they enjoy it. I had to bribe the children to get them to try my Salisbury steak sandwich. They asked, 'What's this?' Oddly enough, now it's one of our popular meals."

Another of the children's favorites is a macaroni casserole Benjamin makes with USDA beef and his special sauce. "I use 15 pounds of beef, 10 pounds of macaroni, and 5 pounds of cheese," he says, "and there aren't any leftovers."

The younger children are reminded to wash up before meals and exhibit acceptable table manners.

"If there's an item that is self-serve, we instruct the children to use proper utensils and to not handle the food with their hands. It's just common

courtesy. But some children are not taught proper courtesies," Benjamin says.

Kids know the officers care

When the kids finish clearing the tables after breakfast, the fun starts. The officers teach classes in ceramics, woodworking, and baking. The kids also can play basketball, ping pong, billiards, arcade games, tabletop hockey, soccer, hopscotch, softball, and bingo. Three local swimming facilities are available for the children to use on sunny days.

The club has many supporters. The Baltimore Orioles organization provides pitching machines, baseballs, gloves, and bats. Buddies Inc., an organization of prominent business and political leaders and media

During summer months, when children don't have access to school meals, the youth club serves breakfast and lunch through USDA's Summer Food Service Program. The master chef is Officer Charles Benjamin. He's been cooking and keeping the kitchen immaculately clean for 10 years.

people, finances a significant portion of the club's operations.

When 100 kids get together, sometimes things get a bit out of hand. But the officers see that disputes get settled quickly and equitably.

"We do not tolerate a 17-year-old disrupting an activity of an 8- or 9-year-old," says Benjamin. "Unfortunately, at some recreational facilities, it's the power of the might. We try to preserve the rights of the smaller children. When kids come in and bully other children off a video game, they have the potential to go up to other people and bully them for money. And that becomes robbery."

Disciplinary action usually doesn't affect the harmonious relationship the officers and kids have. In fact,

they often pal around together after hours. It's not uncommon to see them together under the big top when the circus comes to town or enjoying themselves at an amusement park or zoo. These are new experiences for some of the kids.

"Officer Robert Zeinog, who has been here 27 years with these kids, has only taken off 25 medical days on an unlimited sick leave policy," says Legambi. "The guy's incredible. He and Officer Benjamin took 21 children to Thanksgiving dinner one year."

Officer Benjamin says that's not unusual. "I think every officer here has taken children home. Why? A lot of times the children need just a little bit more attention," he says.

A place to return to for support

The officers say it's hard on the kids when they reach 17 because they have to leave the club. But the young people know the door is always open to come back and visit.

"The other day while I was talking to Officer Benjamin, a 19-year-old walked in with a problem he wanted to discuss with Charlie," Hilliard says. "He was looking for an individual he'd known when he was younger, someone he trusted who

would give him good advice and be a father figure or a big brother to him.

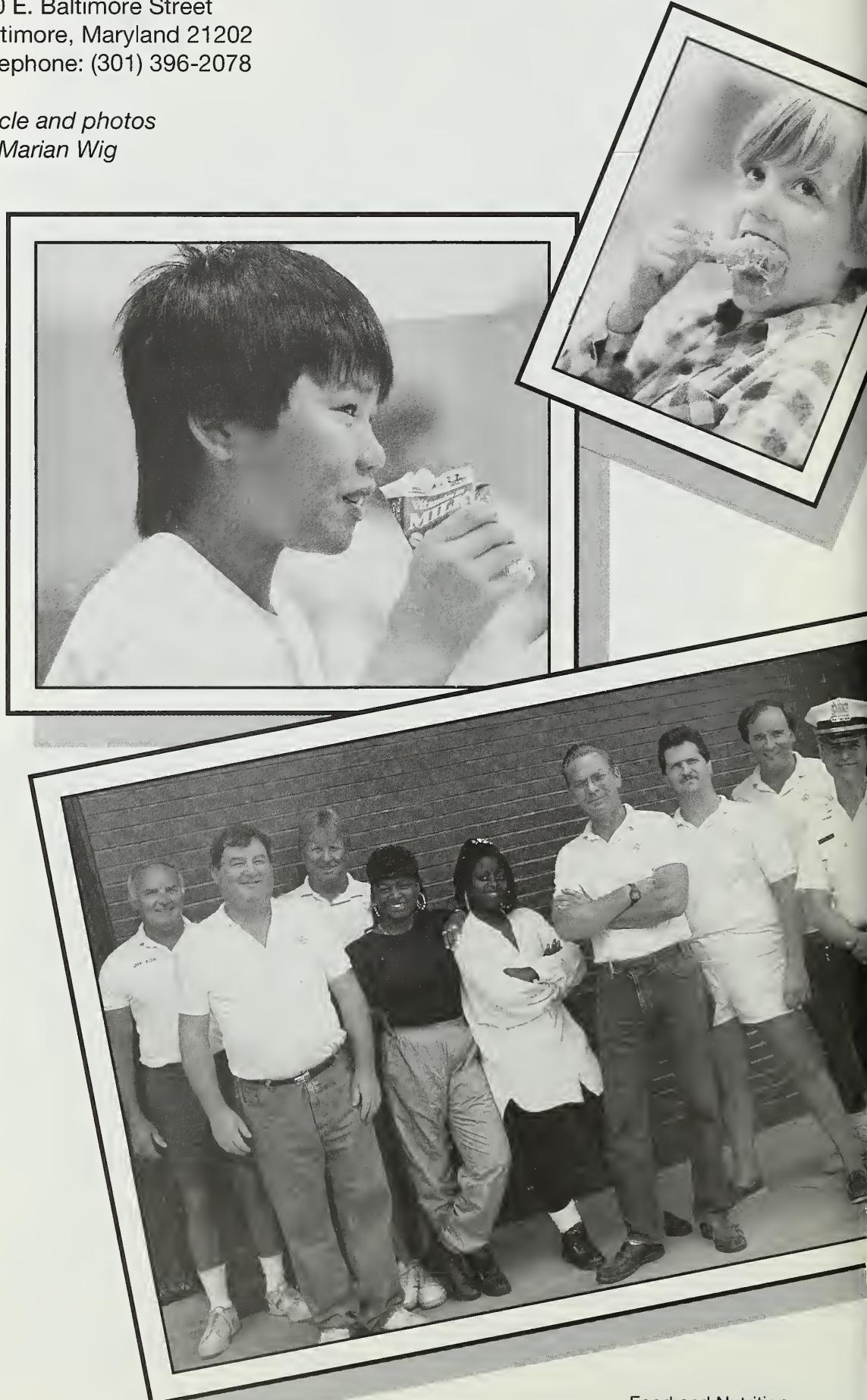
"The fact that this young man was coming back to seek out a member of this club indicates that we certainly are having an impact on the children we deal with. And it's an incredibly positive impact."

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*article and photos
by Marian Wig*

The club's permanent staff is pictured here with some of people who gave them a hand during busy times last summer. From left to right: Police Officers Robert Zeinog, Bill Silvers, and George Seltzer; Cadets Leslie Porter and Bernadette Thomas; Officers Wes Bousman and Charles Benjamin; and Police Agent Martin Hanna, Lieutenant Mike Hilliard, and Sergeant Pete Legambi.

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"Everyone wants to help each other..."

Food Stamp Team Goes The Extra Mile And Gets Results

The doors burst open and into the conference room struts a cartoon character come to life. Complete with a long dress, combat boots, and corn-cob pipe, she takes the microphone and tells the bewildered group she has something to say.

She's not your typical speaker at a meeting of Food Stamp Program administrators. But then again, she's not supposed to be. Her name is "Ma Pat," and while her manner is playful, her mission is serious. She's there to emphasize that the Food Stamp Program is the country's number one defense against hunger, and it's important to operate it efficiently and accurately.

The result of some creative teamwork

When she's not being dramatized in costume by a good-natured federal employee, Ma Pat is a pen-and-ink character who regularly appears in a newsletter called "Ma Pat Reports."

The newsletter and its colorful cartoon character are named after the group that created them—a team of 10 federal, state, and local food stamp staff called the Mid-Atlantic Payment Accuracy Team (MA PAT).

The federal members of the team are from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (MARO) of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). They are: Jim Goodale, chief of MARO's food stamp program evaluation section; Walt Haake, supervisor of the program improvement unit; and Marian Wig, food program specialist with the program improvement unit. Goodale

and Haake were co-founders of the payment accuracy team. The team's state and local members are from social services agencies throughout the region. They include:

—Mary Jo Thomas, director, division of quality control, West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources;

—Gretchen Rowell, benefit programs training specialist, Virginia Department of Social Services;

—Nancy Pearsall, operations administrator, Delaware Department of Health and Social Services;

—Dex Stannard, former food stamp branch chief (retired 1990), District of Columbia Department of Human Services;

—Jack Martin, income maintenance supervisor, Camden County (New Jersey) Board of Social Services;

—Dan Jeffers, director of training services, Philadelphia Department of Public Welfare;

—Bob McCormack, director, income maintenance unit, Prince Georges County (Maryland) Department of Social Services.

Working together to find solutions

Working together, team members have mapped out a campaign to identify and promote ways state and local agencies can make sure food stamp benefits are properly issued. During the past 3 years, they've gone the extra mile—literally and figuratively—to help reduce error rates and improve food stamp operations.

They began by taking a close look at where errors were being made, by whom, and why. Then they gathered information on successful strategies used by local agencies with low error rates, and they devised tools, including "Ma Pat Reports", to distribute information to federal, state, and local food stamp managers and staff.

The group, which meets a few times a year, has also taken its campaign on the road with visits to local agencies that have expressed interest in learning first-hand how to reduce errors. While Ma Pat began as a regional effort, states throughout the country are contributing information and benefiting from the group's work.

The team's work has not gone unnoticed. In fact, in June, the team took to the road for a trip to Washington, D.C., to receive one of the top honors awarded by USDA. In the Department's annual award ceremony on June 12, Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan presented a Superior Service Award to the group for the extra effort and creativity team members have put into conceiving of and carrying out their payment accuracy campaign.

Why reducing errors is so important

The Food Stamp Program is authorized by federal legislation and is available to qualifying households throughout the country. The authorizing legislation gives the Department of Agriculture responsibility for administering the program nationally in cooperation with the appropriate state agencies, usually state departments of welfare or social services.

State agencies work through their local offices to process applications, certify eligible households, and calculate participants' monthly food stamp benefits. In determining eligibility and benefits, state and local staff follow rules and guidelines USDA has prepared in accordance with food stamp legislation.

Miscalculating a household's food stamp allotment by a few dollars may not sound like a lot. But for a family in crisis, an underpayment means

fewer food dollars to get through the month. For government agencies, overpayments mean incorrect use of federal resources allocated for food assistance, and with a program as large as the Food Stamp Program, overpayments can easily add up to millions of dollars.

That's why for several years, national food stamp legislation has included provisions that require states to achieve certain accuracy levels or pay sanctions for failing to meet them. If a state's total amount of benefits issued in error exceeds what's called USDA's "error rate tolerance," the state has to account for the misspent federal dollars.

Together, states issued \$11.6 billion worth of food stamps in fiscal year 1989. If you apply the tolerance level to that—which was 10.8 per-

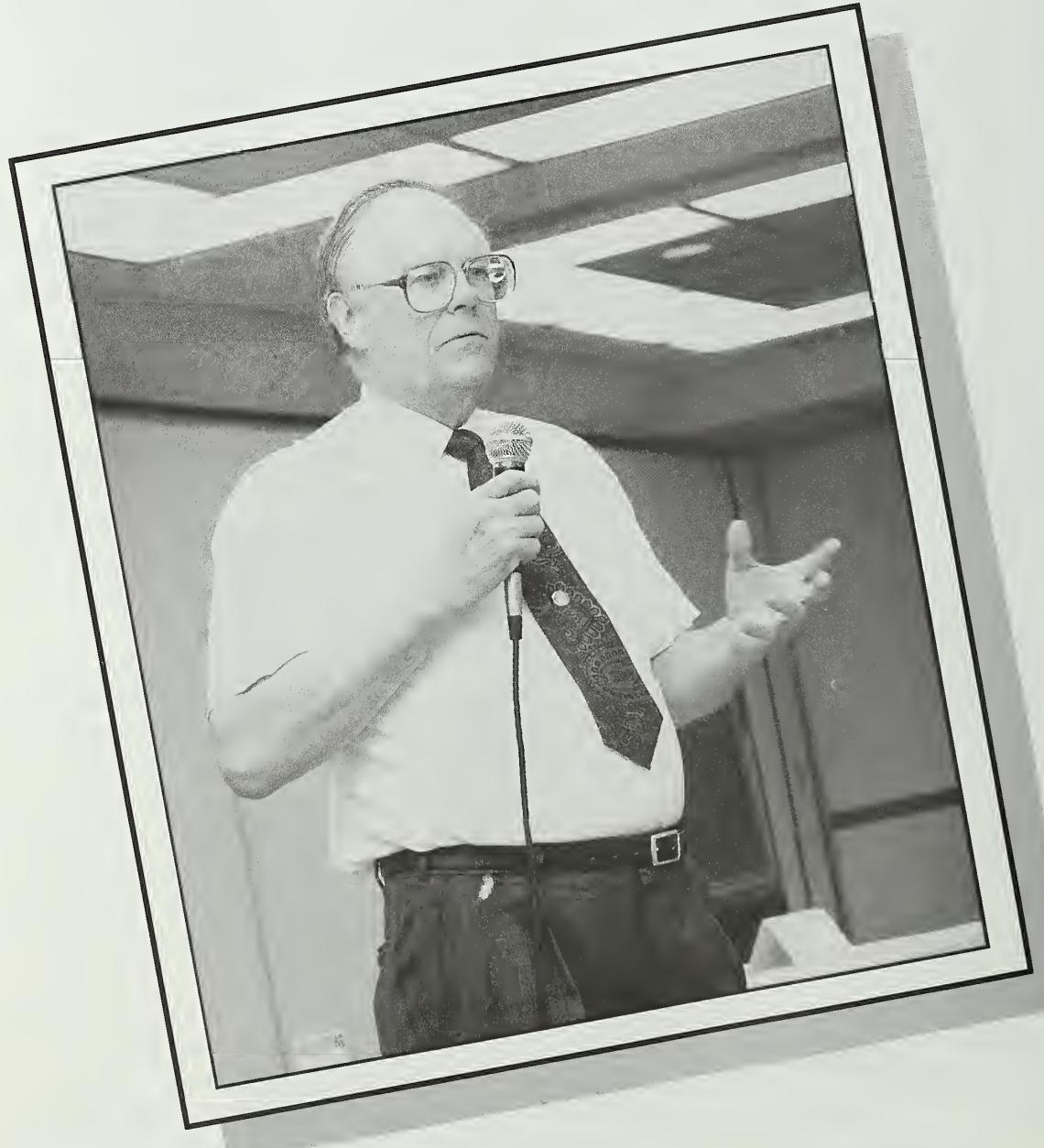
cent at the time—you can see why the Ma Pat team and other program administrators take a strong interest in keeping errors to a minimum.

Team began by asking questions

Ma Pat team members began their work in 1988 by studying error rates and taking a close look at where the most errors were occurring in their region. They found the highest error rates were in large urban areas. According to Walt Haake, food program supervisor in FNS' Mid-Atlantic regional office and co-founder of Ma Pat, that wasn't surprising.

"In rural places, people tend to

Evert Vermeer, from Kent County, Michigan, talks about caseload management at a payment accuracy seminar in Pennsylvania.



know each other," he explains, "so there are fewer opportunities for eligibility workers to get incorrect information from recipients. They also usually have a smaller caseload.

"In the five big cities in this region—the District of Columbia, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Newark, New Jersey—local food stamp staff are struggling to keep up with caseload."

Figuring out a recipient's correct food stamp allotment is a complicated process. According to Haake, a large percentage of errors occurs when information is collected on income, household composition, shelter, utility, child care, and medical expenses. These are just some of the considerations a local food stamp worker needs to deal with, and the information can change from month to month for a particular household.

In addition, local agencies process applications for welfare payments as well as food stamps. Different regulations and policies for such programs as AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) and food stamps can make accurate determinations even more difficult for individual caseworkers.

"We recognized from the start that errors are the result of problems at all three levels of government," Haake says, "and we've tried to find corrective actions appropriate to each level.

"USDA and other federal and state agencies are interested in finding ways to streamline and coordinate public assistance programs—and this should help—but a great deal of work will be needed before this can be done on a large scale."

Putting together helpful "HINTS"

The first important activity the Ma Pat team undertook was what they called the "Helpful Index of National Tips and Strategies"—HINTS for short.

Team members contacted 40 of the largest project areas in the country to get information on what was being done to correct problems. They asked local agencies specifically how they were dealing with vari-



Ma Pat team members Gretchen Rowell (top photo) from Virginia and Walt Haake from FNS' Mid-Atlantic regional office.

ous types of payment errors and then cross-referenced the responses they got. Working with Haake's staff, they programmed the information into a database and made it available to interested agencies as a printout or on diskette.

To reach a wider audience on a regular basis, the group began publishing "Ma Pat Reports" in December 1988. Produced three times a year, the newsletter goes to more than 1,500 state and local offices in the Mid-Atlantic region and to other regions as well.

According to Haake, "Ma Pat Reports" has proved to be an effective way to reach its primary audience—local level administrators and technicians—with practical, low-cost methods for improving payment accuracy. "A lot of the information in 'Ma Pat

...Miscalculating a household's food stamp allotment by a few dollars may not sound like a lot. But for a family in crisis, an underpayment means fewer dollars to get through the month. For government agencies, overpayments mean incorrect use of federal resources allocated for food assistance.

Reports' is useful to staff in offices throughout the country, and a lot of it gets to them," Haake says. "Staff from other regions have started calling in and supplying ideas for articles. It's truly a cooperative effort."

An upbeat design and casual writing style make the newsletter fun to read. "We wanted people to look forward to reading the newsletter," says Haake, "so we decided to try to make it entertaining. Even though the subject is serious, we try to use humor whenever we can to get a point across."

"Ma Pat," the cartoon mascot of the group, is a perfect example. Each issue features an interview between Ma Pat and another character who is also involved in food stamp management.

"For example, in our first cartoon strip," Haake explains, "we had Ma Pat interview a character called Valerie Variance. Valerie, Ma Pat

tells her readers, is 'a notorious error reviewer who's been known to turn a squeaky clean, one-person, fixed income, straightforward food stamp case into a payment accuracy nightmare.' Valerie's philosophy is: 'I know there's an error in this case, and one way or another, I'm gonna find it.'

"We try to go to the edge with the interviews," says Haake. "They're based on the kinds of comments we hear from local level people—comments about 'the feds,' the difficulties of running the program, and error rates.

"The Ma Pat character gets to say some of the things local staff would like to say. It's a fun way to vent some frustrations and come to a much better understanding of how we all work together. I love those interviews but they're tough to write."

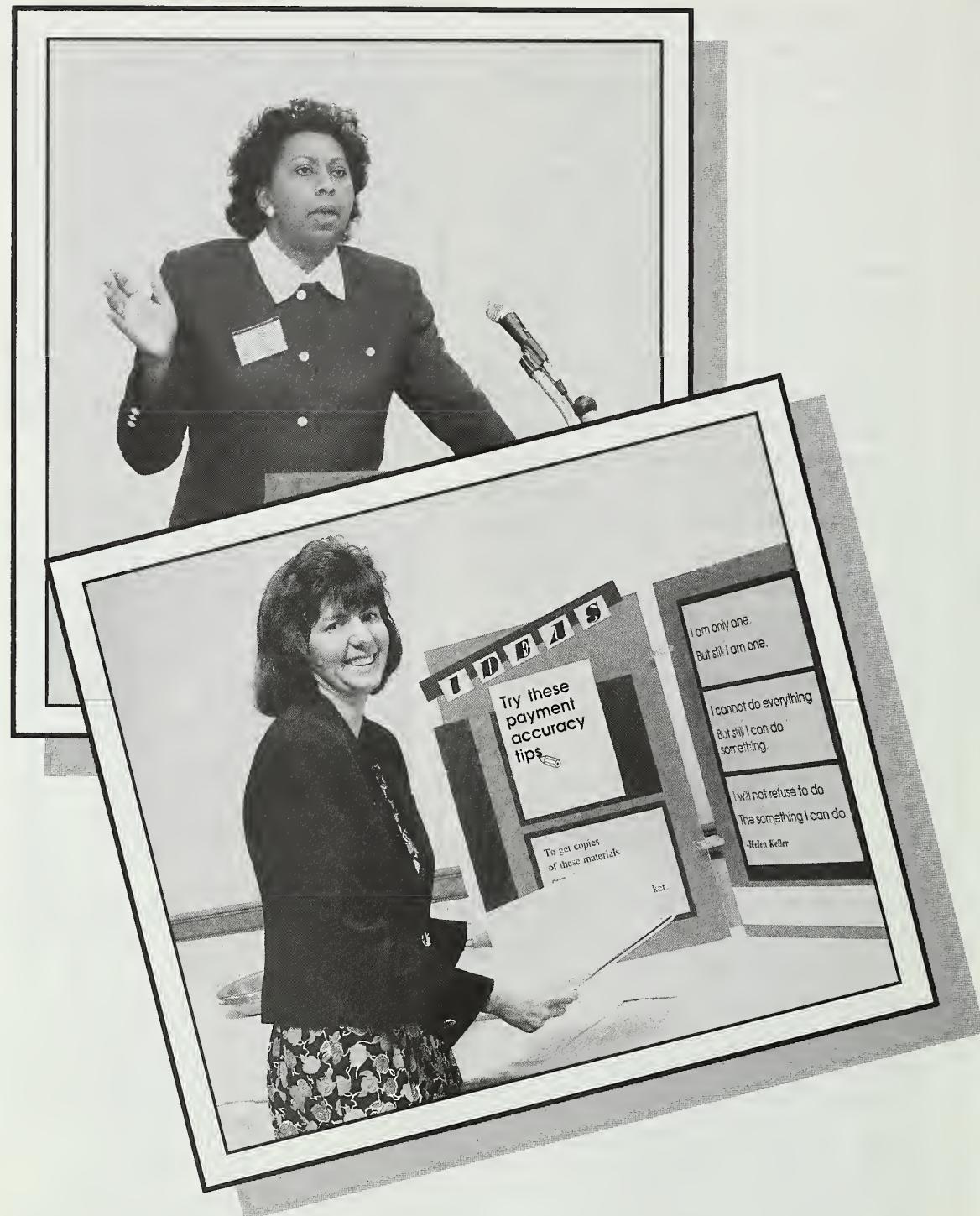
New opportunities to work together

The Ma Pat team has created some new opportunities to hear directly from local staff. This past winter, they began visiting local agencies in the Mid-Atlantic states that have expressed interest in having them come.

Working face to face will be more difficult in some ways, says Haake. "We'll have to put ourselves on the line, as opposed to just publishing ideas. We'll be hearing from a lot of frustrated people who want simple answers. We won't have answers to all the questions right then, but we have good resources and connections and will get useful ideas back to them."

Having annual seminars is another way team members get together with food stamp managers and staff from many different states and counties. The seminars give participants a chance to express their concerns, exchange ideas, and talk about things that worked--and didn't work—to improve payment accuracy.

For example, this year's seminar, held in April, focused on caseload management, an issue very much on the minds of program administrators faced with staffing shortages and



limited resources. Among the speakers was a select panel of local agency eligibility specialists and supervisors from seven Mid-Atlantic states who talked about how they were coping with recent increases in food stamp participation in their areas.

Evert Vermeer, director of the Kent County, Michigan, Department of Social Services, shared some ideas that worked for him a few years ago when Michigan had a severe caseload increase and financial problems.

Virginia welfare fraud control specialist Sandy Brown gave an abbreviated version of a training course she developed to teach caseworkers how to improve their interviewing and communications skills. Included

At the Big Cities Payment Accuracy Seminar in April, Nancy Pearsall from Delaware makes a presentation to the group, and Pat Lynch from New York gathers materials at the "Ideas Fair."

were techniques on how to give and get correct information without a confrontation.

Ma Pat team member Mary Jo Thomas, director of quality control for the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, explained why she's convinced working with quality control—the system that measures payment accuracy—is the road to improvement.

In addition to presentations like these, the seminar featured an "Ideas

Fair," with a display of materials from around the country. "There were about 35 different items people could look at and order," says Haake. "The Ideas Fair was a surprise hit and we're looking to repeat it at our next seminar."

Seminars have another advantage

Besides providing tips and techniques, annual seminars offer another big advantage. "People get to know each other," says Haake. "They swap ideas and phone numbers, and they call one another a lot. It's amazing how much everyone wants to help each other."

Commitment and cooperation are the basis of the Ma Pat team's strategy. Team members have gotten a sustained pledge from the top executives in their offices to improve payment accuracy, and the Mid-Atlantic regional office has additionally provided financial support.

But the heart of the effort comes from individual team members. "They go the extra mile because they really care about their colleagues," says Walt Haake. "They're sincerely interested in the staff and clients in their own offices and in neighboring places."

And that extra effort has produced some very impressive results. The error rate in the Mid-Atlantic region dropped in five of the eight states between fiscal years 1987 and 1989—an improvement that translates into an annual savings of about \$6.2 million in benefits! In fact, for fiscal year 1989, the region's error rate was the lowest in the nation—an improvement of \$19 million over fiscal year 1987.

"Our hard work is paying off..."

At this year's annual conference, the team's cartoon mascot was on hand in full costume to celebrate this

Also at the Big Cities seminar, John Bayne from Washington, D.C., and Sandy Brown from Virginia use visuals to clarify an idea. Tony Masserelli from Pennsylvania accepts an award from "Ma Pat," the team's cartoon mascot, brought to life for the occasion by FNS' Alexis Lometz.

achievement with some awards to state and local agencies deserving special recognition.

"This is proof that our hard work is paying off in real dollars and cents," Ma Pat said. "It means we can take more pride in our work and be confident that others see us as dedicated professionals who get food on the tables of those who are in genuine need....

"But," she added, "...we've got to keep moving forward because there's no such thing as standing still when you've got this kind of a job to do."

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*article and photos
by Marian Wig*

"...we can take more pride in our work and be confident that others see us as dedicated professionals who get food on the tables of those who are in genuine need..."



"I give lunches, clothes, and hugs..."

A Dynamic Woman Keeps Her Promise To Feed Kids

Many people believe the best leaders are those who combine sensitivity and compassion with the desire and know-how to get things done. By any definition, JoeAnna Caldwell is that kind of leader.

Caldwell is a dynamic woman who brings food, love, and a message of hope to low-income minority children living in her hometown of Jacksonville, Illinois. A deeply religious person, Caldwell says both her childhood memories and "a voice from the Lord told me to feed kids."

"Our father died when I was 8 years old and the welfare people wanted us to sell everything and get commodities and move into a housing project," Caldwell says. "We refused. And now my childhood memories are about the sharp pain of hunger."

Her mother grew sweet potatoes, she recalls. "My sister and I used to bake them overnight next to the furnace, wrap them in newspaper, and take them to school. During lunch we'd eat them in the restroom with our feet up so none of the kids would see us."

One day walking to school she smelled bacon cooking. "Tears began to roll and I remember saying over and over to myself, 'I wish someone would adopt me. I wish someone would adopt me.'"

She says she made up her mind then that when she grew up and married she would try to adopt and feed children.

Today Caldwell feeds not only her own nine children—two of whom are, in fact, adopted—she also runs a program called "Saturday's Children" that provides free sack lunches to more than 200 children each week.

"I wrote letters to everyone..."

Jacksonville's school lunch program has come a long way since Caldwell was a little girl. Through the National School Lunch Program, free and reduced-priced lunches are available to students who qualify for them based on need. But Caldwell was concerned about children who did not have enough to eat between lunch on Friday and Monday.

"I've always thought there was a need," she says. "Kids have school lunches during the week, but what about the weekend?" She decided to see what she could do.

"After telling my family we'd have to cut back on spending, I wrote letters to everyone, including social clubs and organizations telling them about Saturday's Children," she explains.

With help from people such as school board president Dr. Robert Crowe, who is superintendent of schools for Illinois' District 17, Caldwell opened a bank account for contributions. A local auto dealer donated a used station wagon for food pickup and deliveries, and the Kiwanis Club paid for the car insurance. Caldwell then mobilized volunteers to make up posters and solicit food from local businesses.

More than 40,000 lunches later...

Since 1986 when she started "Saturday's Children," Caldwell and her volunteers have packed nearly 40,000 bag lunches. Every Friday night, they gather at Jefferson Elementary School, which is near Caldwell's house and not far from the designated Saturday distribution points.

As some volunteers unload boxes of bread donated by places like the local Sunbeam Bread distribution center, others carry in crates of fresh fruits and vegetables and boxes of peanut butter, jelly, and cookies.

They organize themselves into several assembly lines making peanut-butter-and-jelly or sometimes ham sandwiches; washing and cutting up fresh vegetables; and packing oranges, fruit juice, and cookies into lunch sacks donated by McDonald's.

An hour later the lunches are ready for the volunteers to load into the Saturday's Children station wagon. The next day, as she has for the past 4 years, Caldwell will make the Saturday deliveries herself.

Dr. Crowe was instrumental in helping Caldwell start Saturday's Children in 1986 and is still a strong



From the back of the Saturday Children's station wagon, JoeAnna Caldwell distributes lunches to waiting children.

supporter of her efforts. "A lot of us do volunteer work," he says. "It's a fine thing to volunteer once in a while—like at the Salvation Army—but it's something else to sign on to a commitment for several years.

"This woman and her volunteers make more than 200 sandwiches every week. We are dealing here with hungry kids. And JoeAnna Caldwell is doing something about it, almost singlehandedly."

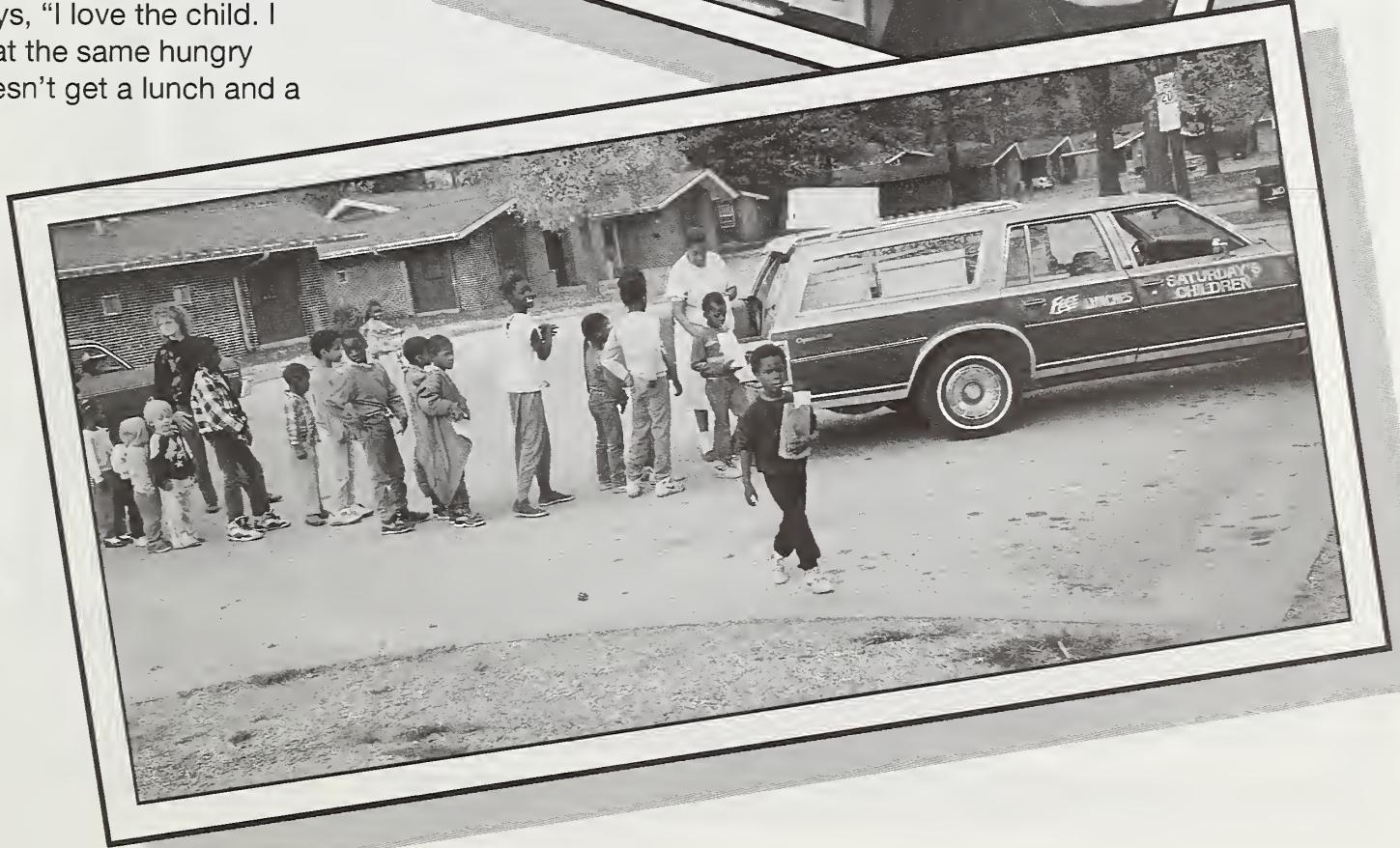
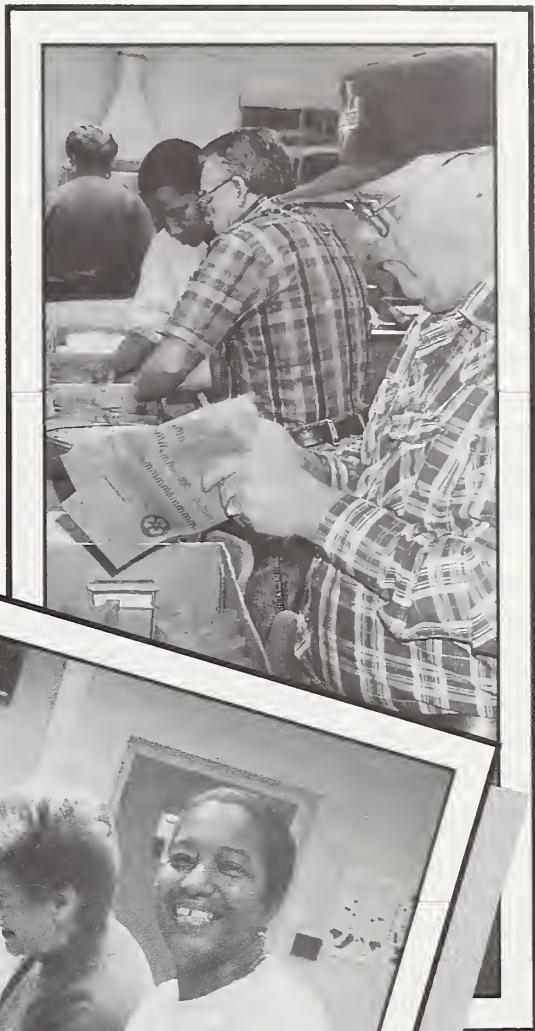
"I give lunches, clothes, and hugs..."

It's more than just bag lunches that Caldwell gives to the children. "I can always tell a child who is not getting enough parental love," she says. "Children who are not used to hugs hold themselves stiff. So I give lunches, clothes, and hugs."

As the first African-American elected to the school board in Jacksonville, Caldwell brings a first-hand perspective to the needs of the city's low-income minority children and their families. Sometimes she hears people say that the children's parents should try to do more for them, and she says she both accepts and rejects this criticism. Ultimately, it's the children she's concerned about.

"Sure I'm angry at parents who are irresponsible," she says, adding that many others are doing their best. "But," she says, "I love the child. I tell people that the same hungry child who doesn't get a lunch and a

Every Friday night, Caldwell and her volunteers gather at Jefferson Elementary School to prepare and pack more than 200 lunches for children. The food is donated by places like the local Sunbeam Bread distribution center, and the lunch sacks are provided by McDonald's. Saturday's Children is supported by many groups and businesses in the community, thanks to Caldwell's efforts.



hug today might someday rob or rape you."

When Caldwell is not being "the sack lunch lady," as the children call her, she's a caseworker with the Morgan County Big Brothers and Big Sisters Association in Jacksonville.

"The community is very supportive of JoeAnna," says John Kelker, executive director of the Big Brothers and Big Sisters Association in Jacksonville. He says her support partly stems from the fact that she avoids direct solicitation of funds and food.

"JoeAnna believes in letting the news about Saturday's Children spread by word of mouth," he says, adding that organizations such as the Kiwanis, businesses, and churches know when it's time to contribute. "She has the ability to get people involved in taking care of our community."

Kelker believes Caldwell's Saturday's Children program filled a need that no one else was addressing. "Her efforts were a real eye-opener for the community," he says.

Working to help in many ways

Caldwell's volunteer efforts have also expanded into other areas. Each summer, for example, she or-

ganizes and runs a program she calls "I Have A Dream."

"I teach social skills to low-income kids—how to set a table, how to eat with manners, how to introduce themselves to adults, how to give someone a compliment," she says. "I then take the children out to a nice restaurant to test their new skills."

In addition, she runs a summer reading program and has experimented with a Monday soup distribution program for low-income elderly people. "I try a hundred-and-one things," Caldwell says, "and I really enjoy doing it. It takes someone who has been there to relate."

Sixth-grade Jefferson Elementary teacher Donald Jolly has taught many of Caldwell's Saturday lunch kids and says he can see the results of her work. "She takes children who are wounded and damaged and heals them," he says.

Jolly attributes the success and respect Caldwell achieves among his students and their parents to her emphasis on discipline and achievement. "The strength of her family pulls her toward success and accomplishment," he says. "There is no doubt she is the premier family role model for the African-American community. She is definitely a force

for change in Jacksonville."

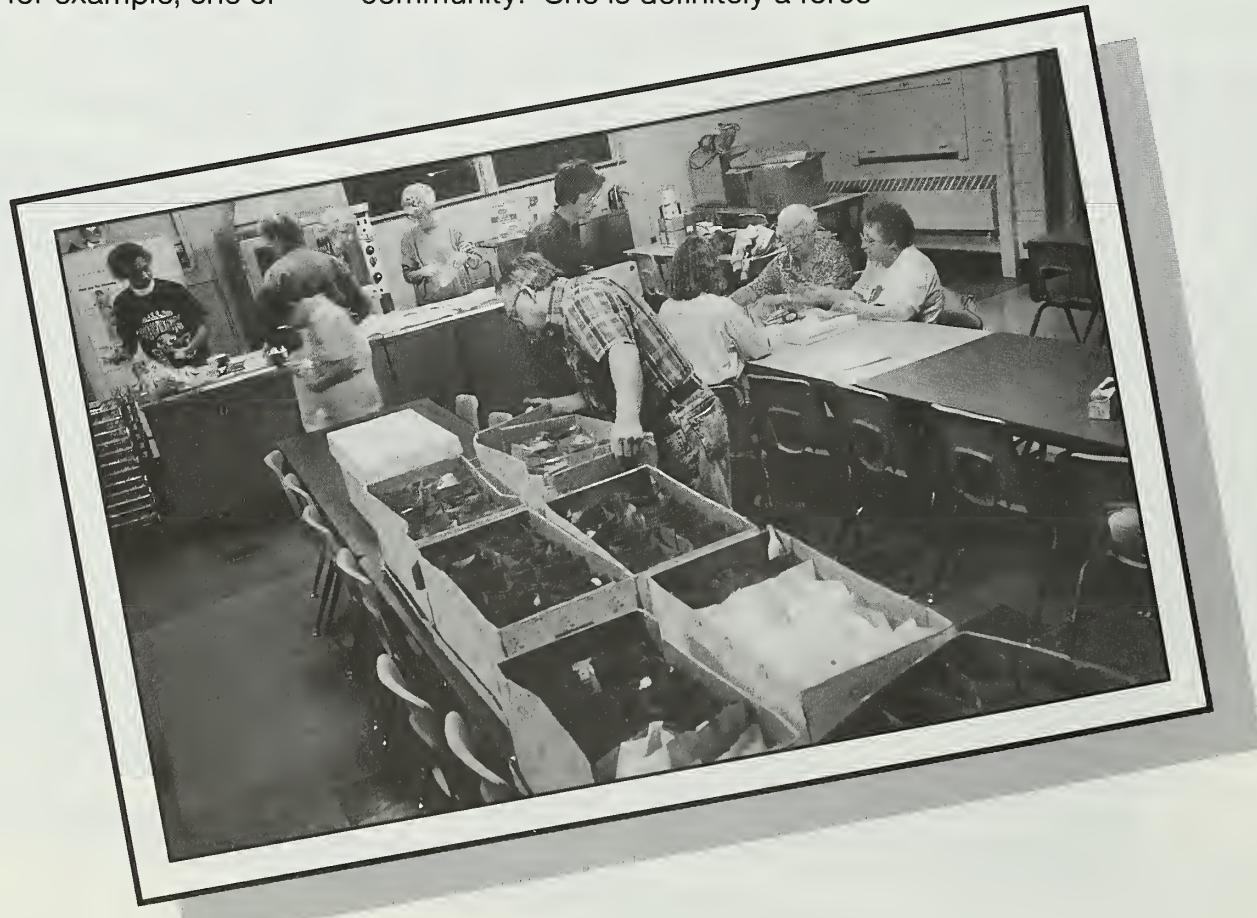
It's Caldwell's impression that most people want to help. "People have good hearts," she says. "Sometimes they just don't know how to step forward and channel their energy for the good."

School superintendent Crowe says that when Caldwell first came to him with the idea of the Saturday's Children food program, he felt embarrassed that he had not thought of it, that he and others had not focused on solving the problem of hungry children in the community.

"We need to take that first step toward action sooner," he says. "We need more JoeAnna Caldwell's in life to show us how."

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*article and photos
by Lawrence Rudman*



Food Help And Community Service Go Hand In Hand

Look closely at any successful operation, and you're likely to find people who are energetic, creative, and enthusiastic about what they do. That's certainly true of the people who run two successful Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) sites in Des Moines, Iowa, and Denver, Colorado.

The two operations have much in common. Both use a supermarket set-up to provide efficient, streamlined service to CSFP participants. Both give participants nutrition information and recipes along with supplemental foods. And both make special efforts to coordinate with volunteers, community organizations, and other social service agencies.

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program is one of several food assistance programs USDA administers in cooperation with state and local agencies. CSFP provides USDA commodities to low-income mothers, infants, and young children (age 6 and younger), and to low-income elderly people (age 60 and older). CSFP participants receive a variety of USDA foods, depending on their age and nutritional needs.

The Des Moines and Denver programs are two of 47 local CSFP sites currently operating around the country.

At the CSFP center in Denver, a woman shops for supplemental foods for her baby. The supermarket set-up used here, like the one in Des Moines, makes it easy for participants to locate and select various CSFP foods.

larger USDA program serving mothers, infants, and children), and then creates a shopping list.

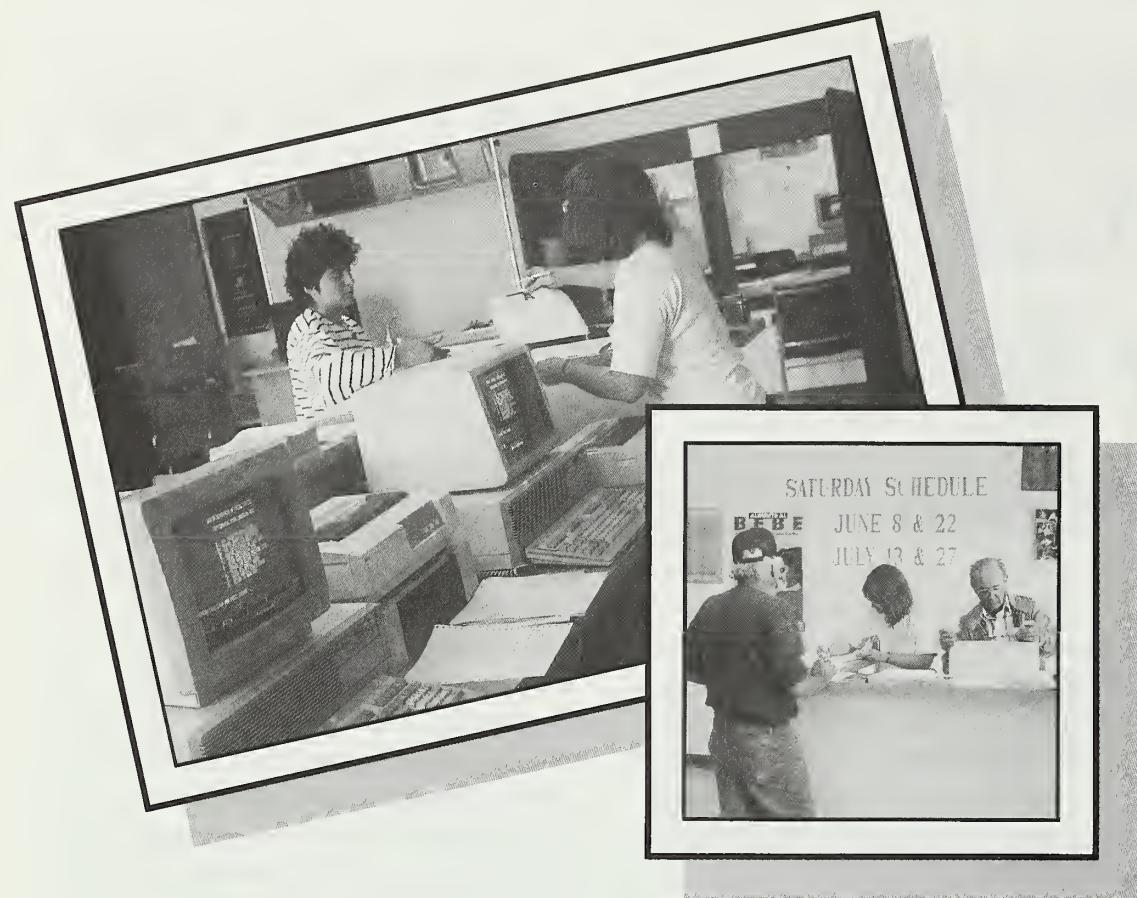
Armed with that list, clients wheel shopping carts past bins of commodity foods, making selections from various food groups in quantities computer-matched to family ages and numbers. They don't have to accept anything they can't use without waste.

Check-out is also computerized, thanks to the use of electronic scanning equipment in check-out lanes. The scanners, which the Denver facility also hopes to add eventually, "read" the bar codes on packages and cans of USDA commodity foods. In addition to making check-out faster and easier for participants, the electronic scanning equipment helps CSFP managers keep better track of inventory and distribution.

There are other special features

Des Moines' CSFP supermarket is also equipped to make it easier for participants to get their packages home. A conveyor belt transfers par-





In both operations, computers help CSFP staff provide fast, efficient service to participating mothers, children, and elderly people. Here, for example, Denver staff check on participants' eligibility status.

ticipants' packages from the check-out counter to a pick-up point where they can easily be loaded into cars. For elderly people who cannot come to the distribution center, there is home delivery.

In addition to this streamlined delivery system, Des Moines' CSFP facility has several other special features. For example, there are television monitors that play educational tapes, and a playroom so mothers can shop in peace while their children are happily occupied.

There's also a well-baby clinic on the premises that offers immunizations, lead-poisoning screening, and iron-level blood tests to CSFP mothers and children.

Of interest to both mothers and elderly participants is the demonstration kitchen operated by home economists from USDA's Extension Service. The home economists show participants how to prepare tasty dishes, using commodity foods that are sometimes unfamiliar to them.

During a recent demonstration, Extension staffers made dollar-size pancakes from commodity egg mix and evaporated milk; they also mixed batter for carrot muffins using commodity nonfat dry milk, egg mix, honey, and canned carrots.

Food and education go hand in hand

Food and education also go hand in hand at Denver's CSFP facility. As in Des Moines, the program uses a supermarket set-up that makes it simple for participating mothers and elderly people to select supplemental foods. There are also many special features, such as home delivery for the elderly and babysitting for children whose mothers are shopping for CSFP foods.

Food preparation and demonstration classes are offered 3 days a week by teachers from the Emily Griffith Opportunity School—a vocational school that's part of the Denver public school system—and recipes are always available.

Making sure participants get and know how to use their CSFP foods is the greatest concern of Denver CSFP administrator Tony Quintana and his staff. However, they don't stop there. Working closely with other groups, they've made the

CSFP facility a center for a variety of community-supported activities. For example, on a monthly basis, the facility becomes a distribution site for Colorado SHARE, a local affiliate of an innovative private nonprofit program currently operating in 18 locations around the country.

SHARE gives interested families and individuals opportunities to save on food costs by contributing time to volunteer efforts in their communities. In exchange for 2 hours' community service and \$13 in cash or food stamps, participants earn one "share" which is equivalent to one food package. (SHARE has received authorization from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service to accept food stamps.)

If they wish, participants can buy more than one "share" on this same basis. They can donate their time to any verified volunteer effort—such as Boy and Girl Scouts, churches or synagogues, libraries, schools, senior centers, hospitals, or even SHARE's food warehouse itself.

"Food for Thought" gets books to kids

Another laudable offshoot of the Denver CSFP operation is "Food for Thought," a program designed to help children learn to enjoy books and get a head start on developing reading skills.

Drawing on community help, volunteers converted a small room into a children's book center. It looks like a library, with colorful shelves stocked with books for 1- to 6-year-olds. The big difference is that instead of lending books, this library gives them to children.

Once every 3 months, CSFP participants can stop by the library and help their children select books. Each child can get one book per visit. There's no restriction on reading level, and older children sometimes select books to read to their younger siblings.

"Food for Thought" depends on grants and donations for support. Capitol Hill Books, a local bookstore, helped the department of social services set up an initial assortment of



The children's book center, which is supported by many local sponsors in Denver, looks like a library. But when kids select books here, they get to keep them.



books, furnishing them at a considerable discount and showing CSFP staff how to make any needed repairs. Now that insurance requirements have been met, a volunteer coordinator, Marilyn Weiss, helps out on a part-time basis.

Keeping shelves stocked is an ongoing effort, aided by the support of many local sponsors, including the "Rocky Mountain News," television Channel 4, and IBM, which underwrote a grant.

Together with other local sponsors, such as King Soopers supermarkets and radio station KHOW, they have managed to incorporate special book drives into several Denver events. For example, under KHOW sponsorship, the Big Fun amusement center collected 400 books over the Easter holiday a year ago by offering a \$5.95 admission to anyone donating a new or used book.

Through another book drive—"A Book and a Buck for Baseball"—Denver Zephyrs baseball fans could get \$6.00 game tickets for just \$1.00 and a donated book.

In addition, a "Food for Thought" table was given space at the gala opening of Denver's new convention center last June, and Elitch Gardens amusement park offered free gate admission over the Labor Day week-

end in exchange for books for kids under age 6.

Even the Denver Zoo helped out with a special offer at Halloween called "A Book and a Boo and the Zoo." Patrons donating books got free admission for the day.

Additional support came from Grayland Country Day School, which sponsored a fall book drive, and from local public libraries, where colorful book barrels were placed to receive donated books. The barrels were hard to miss, thanks to the work of a local graphic artist and a print shop who donated their time and talent to produce colorful Day-Glo pink wraps for them.

With a little help from their friends

Along with his predecessor Betty Donovan, who began the project, Tony Quintana and his staff have given time and thought to making "Food for Thought" a success. Like the CSFP team in Des Moines, their concern for their clients has translated into some creative approaches to coordinating services.

With a little help from their friends, CSFP staff in both Des Moines and Denver are putting forth a super effort to help those they serve.

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*article by Joanne Widner
photos by Craig Forman*

Nutrition education is a winning idea...

Dallas Schools Cheer Children On To Good Health

When people hear the words "Dallas" and "cheerleaders," they're likely to think of football, the Dallas Cowboys, and a stadium packed with enthusiastic fans urging their team on to victory.

But there are some other cheerleaders in this famous Texas city—they're members of the Food and Child Nutrition Services Department of the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) and what they're rooting for is the health and nutritional well-being of the 133,000 children enrolled in DISD schools.

Together they've rallied teachers and parents to work with them on what has become a winning nutrition education campaign, and like any good cheerleading squad, they've given a lot of thought to their message and how to present it.

Variety of special projects developed

Packaged to appeal to an audience accustomed to the clever marketing and lively images of the 1990's, the campaign is complete with catchy names like "The Healthy Meal Deal," "Nutrition in a Nutshell," and "Project TUNE" for "Teaming Up for Nutrition Education."

Teamwork, in fact, is central to the district's approach to nutrition education. So is sharing information and ideas. "For nutrition education to really take root," says food service director Marjorie Craft, "you have to promote good eating habits in the school cafeteria, the classroom, and at home."

Clark and her staff have developed a variety of special projects to help food service employees, teachers, and parents take an active role in teaching children about the foods they eat and why making good food choices is so important to their health.

Keeping food service employees interested and well-informed is central to the effort. Once a month, the district publishes a monthly newsletter called "Nutrition in a Nutshell"

that goes to all 1,500 food service department employees.

It provides information on a variety of nutrition-related topics and includes a number of regular features. For example, there is a "Great Ideas" section with food and nutrition tips from employees, a "Dateline" column outlining important upcoming events in the department, and a "Recipe Center."

"Food service employees need to learn nutrition basics and be kept informed so they know why the meals they are preparing are nutritious and well-balanced," says Craft.

The newsletter also helps keep employees' morale high. "It's important for them to feel part of a team that's doing something worthwhile for children. People like knowing they're doing something important," Craft adds.

To help teachers be part of the nutrition education team, the food services department has put together a special in-service program called "Cafeteria ABC's," which cafeteria



managers present at the beginning of the school year. As part of the "Cafeteria ABC's," teachers learn about activities they can plan for their students. They also receive teaching aids to use in their classrooms.

"Most of the teachers, especially our new ones, think the ABC's presentation is very informative," says kindergarten teacher Pearl Young. "The activities and posters are very helpful."

The teachers also get tips on how to help children, particularly the youngest ones, become familiar with school meals and comfortable going through the serving line.

In addition, during the first week of school, food service staff give groups of children an introductory tour through the cafeteria. Students meet the cafeteria manager and other food service employees, see where food is prepared, and learn where to pick up and drop off their trays.

As Craft explains, this not only helps the children feel more relaxed about eating at school, it also makes it easier for staff to give them good service. "The first weeks of school are hectic for students, teachers, and the cafeteria staff," she says. "Breakfast and lunch lines move more slowly when students are not familiar with the serving line and cafeteria arrangement.

"And," she adds, "a cafeteria tour during the first few days of school can be an important learning experience for first timers, especially kindergarten and first-grade students."

Activities continue throughout the year

Food service staff and teachers work together throughout the school year to provide interesting learning experiences for children of all ages.

Project TUNE—Teaming Up for Nutrition Education—is another resource Craft and her staff have developed to give teachers ideas, activities, and support. As part of the project, cafeteria managers visit classrooms and give demonstrations or talks on particular topics.

Another part of Project TUNE is a series of nutrition lessons the food services department has developed for use with children in kindergarten through Grade 3. They are planning to expand the series to Grades 4-6. The lessons are not restricted to a specific grade level, allowing teachers to select activities that fit into



Children are the winners when food service staff, teachers, and parents work together on nutrition education. Below: Cafeteria manager Mary Guthrie gives Kimball High School students a tour of the school kitchen.



"For nutrition education to really take root, you have to promote good eating habits in the school cafeteria, the classroom, and at home."

their own lesson planning. In fact, teachers are encouraged to modify lessons to best fit their students' needs. Reaction from students, teachers, and cafeteria staff has been enthusiastic.

Bobbie Starr, cafeteria manager at DISD's Seagoville Elementary, says this about her recent visit with a group of second graders: "The students enjoyed the lesson and were interested in the information. And I felt good knowing I was teaching them something that could really impact their lives. As a parent, I hope my own children will receive this kind of nutrition information."

To give students opportunities to put into practice what they're learning about healthy food choices, DISD's food service department has added some new features in school lunchrooms.

Last year, three of the district's secondary schools successfully introduced a new serving station called the "Healthy Alternative." This deli-style self-service line offers a number of nutritious choices compatible with the "Dietary Guidelines" issued by the federal government.

These guidelines recommend, among other things, that Americans: eat a variety of nourishing foods; use sugar and salt only in moderation; and choose a diet that is low in fat and includes plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables and grain products.

DISD's "Healthy Alternative" line features many health-and-fitness favorites such as salads, homemade soups, sandwiches made with whole-grain bread, fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, and muffins.

The "Healthy Meal Deal" offered daily at this special serving station

meets USDA meal pattern requirements (as do all meals served through the National School Lunch Program in DISD schools) and runs on a 7-day menu cycle. It consists of a sandwich on whole-grain bread, fruit, vegetable, and milk.

For children paying full price, the meal costs 90 cents in elementary schools and 95 cents in secondary schools. Children qualifying for reduced-price meals (based on income and family size) pay 40 cents.

Kids like being given the opportunity to make their own selections. "The Healthy Alternative is excellent," says eighth-grader Joy Dobbs. "I really like having a choice. Two thumbs up!"

Ninth grader Kim Kelley is also pleased. "The line is really interesting and a great idea," she says.

Food service managers hope to have the Healthy Alternative Line in all of the district's 49 secondary schools by spring 1992. They're also extending the idea to the elementary school level on a smaller scale—this year 11 elementary schools are offering "The Healthy Meal Deal" twice a week as a choice with the regular menu.

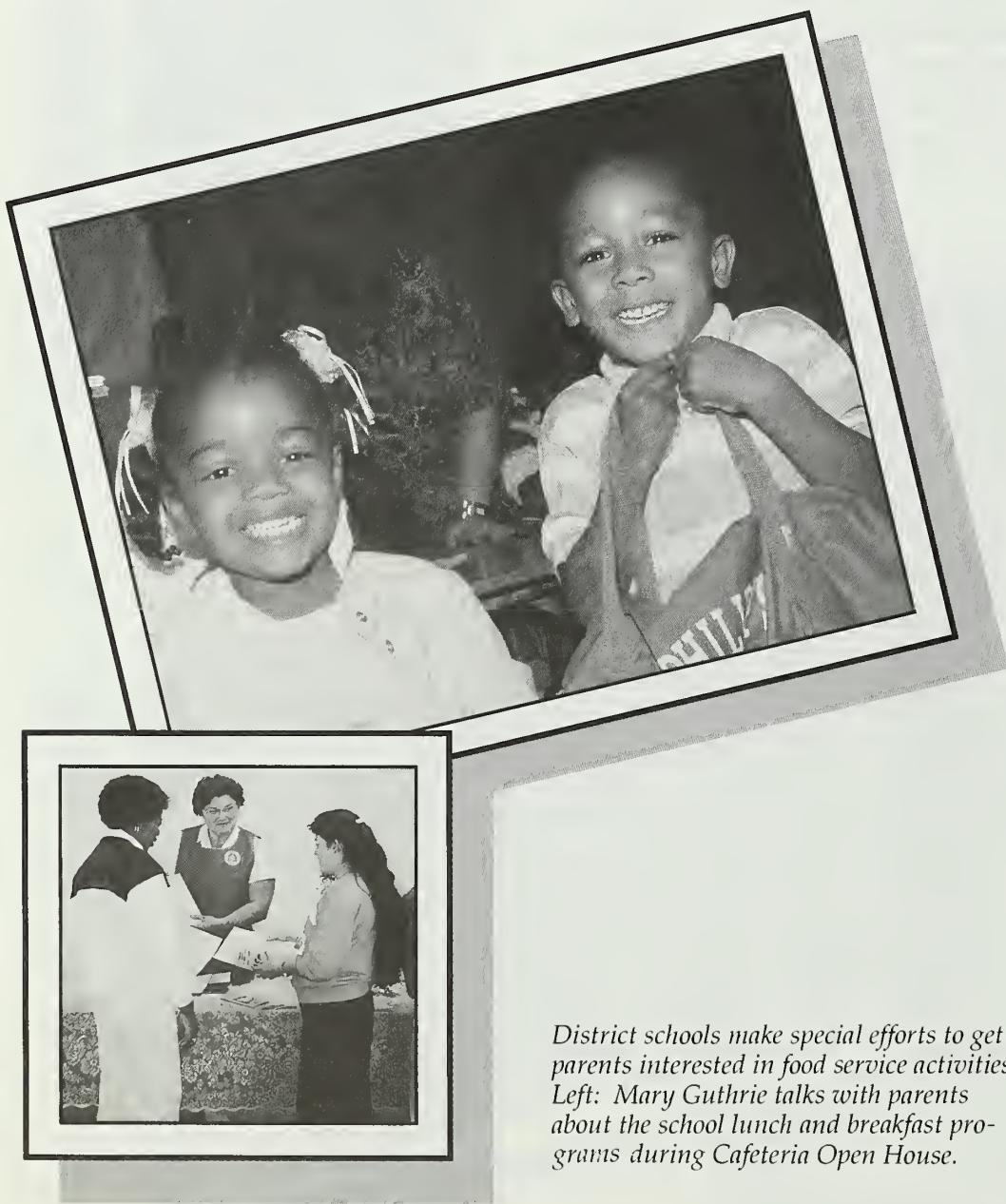
"This is turning out to be very popular with the younger students, too, and we hope to offer it in more elementary schools next year," says Craft.

Parents encouraged to get involved

Just as Craft and her staff go the extra mile to involve teachers in nutrition education, they also make special efforts to get parents interested in food service activities.

One way they do this is by hosting a Cafeteria Open House to introduce parents to the school cafeteria manager and give them a tour of the lunchroom and school kitchen. During the Open House, usually held on parent-teacher conference night, the cafeteria manager answers any questions parents may have about school lunch and breakfast.

Brochures on the programs are available in English and Spanish, and parents also receive a comment form



District schools make special efforts to get parents interested in food service activities. Left: Mary Guthrie talks with parents about the school lunch and breakfast programs during Cafeteria Open House.

they can use to offer their opinions and make recommendations.

Craft and her staff approach school food service with vitality and concern for children. Their goal is to help their young customers learn healthy eating habits that will remain with them long after they leave DISD lunchrooms.

"Teaching students to make wise food choices is a challenge," Craft admits. But she says she's convinced that nutrition education can make a difference when school food service managers, teachers, and parents all support it.

"I am confident nutrition education will result in students making wiser choices in the cafeteria," Craft says, "and that this will translate into healthier lifestyles."

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"Teaching students to make wise food choices is a challenge...[but] I am confident nutrition education will result in students making wiser choices in the cafeteria and that this will translate into healthier lifestyles."



U. S. Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use, \$300

THIRD CLASS BULK RATE
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U. S. Department of Agriculture
Permit Number G-39

Published three or four times
a year by the Food and Nutrition
Service, U.S. Department
of Agriculture, Alexandria,
Virginia 22302.

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Secretary of Agriculture

Catherine Bertini
Assistant Secretary

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Food and Nutrition magazine contains articles on the family food assistance and child nutrition programs administered by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) in cooperation with state governments and local agencies.

The Secretary of Agriculture has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of this Department. The use of funds for printing this publication has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

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